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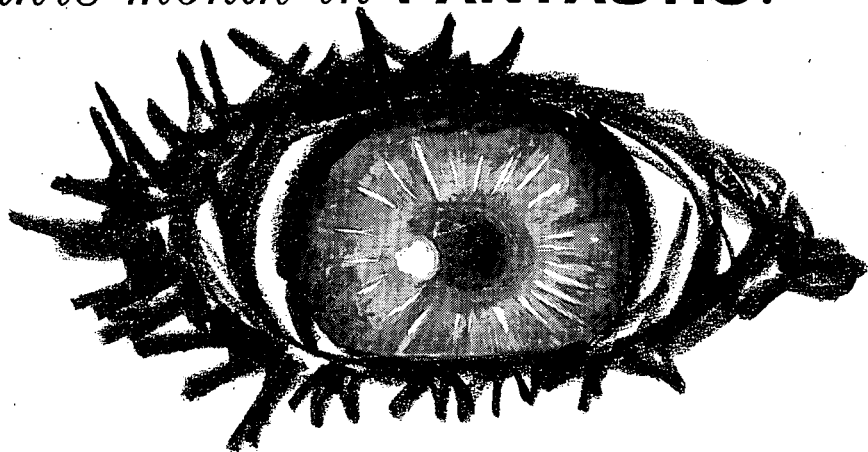


HUNTER PATROL

By H. Beam Piper

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this month in **FANTASTIC:**

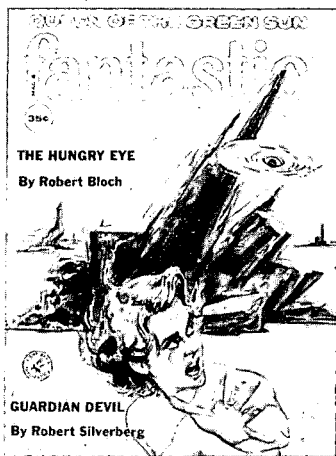


THE HUNGRY EYE

By Robert Bloch

May FANTASTIC features a chilling tale you're sure to enjoy—as master storyteller Bloch follows the path of an ancient evil to a “beat” joint in Chicago. For sheer excitement, you won’t want to miss this novelette—or the other macabre stories by Henry Slesar, Raymond E. Banks, Arthur Porges, and Robert Silverberg.

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E d i t o r i a l

Have you ever thought about science fiction and the people who are part of it as special? Here's why, in a guest editorial . . .

By ISAAC ASIMOV

FEW PEOPLE have ever considered the therapeutic qualities of science fiction and yet from all that I can see—and I have been looking for twenty years as you all know—there is definite evidence that something about sf wipes out the general miseries of humanity.

I have known, first and last at least two dozen science fiction editors, at least fifty science fiction writers and uncounted hundreds of science fiction fans.

If there is one thing that unites all of them, editors, writers, fans (and me) it is a quality of enthusiasm undimmed by age. They love to laugh, they love to be excited, they love to be interested. The world is not a dull place for them. It may be strange, it may be tantalizing, it may be frustrating, but it is not dull.

How else can it possibly be for anyone who loves science fiction? Is science fiction a literature of escape? Nuts. Is atomic warfare, space travel, robots, and—in general—man facing the scientific future *escape*? Of course not. It is the science fiction personality who dares to face life as it is with its dangers and risks. It is the science fiction personality who dares face *change* without feeling the sense of loss that goes with the departure from the womb—whatever world is not a dull place for them.

This is healthy. There may have been a time in history when it was fine for the individual to be adjusted to his way of life; but this is no longer the time. This is a time when it is fine for the individual not to be adjusted to his way of life, because his way of life changes every year. He must be adjusted to change and it takes a healthy (in the modern sense) man to do that.

Science fiction personalities, by their very interest in science fiction adjust themselves to change. And if someone feels the world to be frightening and harrowing because it doesn't stay the same, I recommend a diet of science fiction and the company of science fictioners.

It may take some getting used to at first; some acknowledgment of the fact that what seems a mild insanity at times can be an essential sanity, but in the end he'll love it all; sf and sf people. As I do.

Do the actions of a wild-running Communist robot reflect the thinking of a Communist master? Here is the first Soviet s-f story ever translated for U. S. s-f readers. It first appeared in "Znanie-Sila," a fact science publication which runs one fiction piece each issue. Its title in Russian is "Spontani Refleks"—Spontaneous reflex. We call it . . .

INITIATIVE

By BORIS and ARKADY STRUGATSKI

TRANSLATED BY HARMON RUTLEY

CALL it boredom. Generally speaking, boredom is the product of monotony, of the tedium of everyday life, or is a symptom of inner dissatisfaction. Such loss of interest in one's surroundings is occasionally to be noted in the higher animals, but the experience of real boredom or world-weariness is restricted to mankind. For in order to be bored, one must have a fully developed nervous system; to be bored one must be able to think, to suffer. Now Urm had no nervous system whatsoever, in the usual meaning of the term. He couldn't think. He certainly was incapable of suffering. He only reacted to specific stimuli in specific ways; his pattern of responses was fixed, he was bored. The whole thing had started after the Master had gone out.

It suddenly occurred to Urm that there was nothing new to be memorized. In addition to his fixed pattern of responses, the accumulation of new impressions was a basic stimulus to his activity. Urm was suddenly consumed with an insatiable thirst to receive and commit to memory as much as possible. If no new phenomena were at hand, they must be sought out. But Urm's immediate environment was completely familiar. This vast room with its gray stippled walls, low white ceiling, and metal doors had been in his memory-cells from the first moment of his awareness. There was always the odor of heated metal. From above the ceiling the same

Note: "URM" is a name made up of the initial letters of three Russian words which might be rendered: "Universally Reacting Mechanism."

muted rumble always reached him. Humans could not hear it without special instruments, but it was quite audible to Urm. Although the day-light lamps in the ceiling were out, Urm, in almost total darkness, "saw" the room clearly by radar and in the infra-red range.

In the absence of new impressions, Urm, bored, sought fresh stimuli. He gave his body a side-wise lurch and stepped ponderously forward. The concrete floor resounded dully under his thick rubber-soled feet. A familiar sound. Urm had walked before—on instructions from the Master. Urm proceeded across the room, stopping at the wall. He sniffed it, detecting the same old odor of paint, plaster, cement and rusting steel. Urm turned abruptly, re-crossed the room diagonally to the door through which the Master had disappeared a short time ago. His program included opening doors. Seizing the door-knob with his claw-like hand, he turned it. The door opened with a faint, drawn-out grating sound, and Urm stepped across the threshold and found himself before a concrete staircase. Urm immediately counted eighteen steps and committed the fact to memory along with distances of each step and their dimensions. Translating these data automatically into the necessary movements of his legs, he slowly mounted the staircase toward a landing illuminated by a light-source whose spectrum and in-

tensity was duly filed away. The landing led on one side to another flight of stairs—ten of them—and on the other to a wide hallway. Drawn, perhaps, by the sensation of warmth proceeding from the hallway, Urm turned that way noting a strong source of infra-red radiation coming from certain ribbed rectangular prisms near the floor. Urm had never seen a radiator before—the Master's rooms were heated in a different manner—and he examined this new phenomenon attentively. Having counted and measured the sections and recorded their radiation and heat, he bent and seized one of them in both claws and picked it up to complete his survey. There was a sharp crack and a grating of metal as a cloud of steam rose to the ceiling. Urm methodically took note of this occurrence as he examined the broken section on all sides and studied the jagged edges of the fresh break. His research completed, he set the piece aside and sloshed through the puddles of water toward a door at the end of the corridor. Over the door was a sign reading *Danger—Do Not Enter Without Protective Clothing*. Urm read the sign and stored the information away. He understood that such warnings applied to humans. They did not concern him. He turned the door-knob, but the door did not swing open as the other one had. He pushed it. There was a splintering as the lock was torn from its moorings, and the door open-

ed. Urm committed to memory the fact that this door had to be pushed a little before it moved freely.

There were plenty of new and interesting impressions in this room. It was filled with strange objects of every size and shape. In the center of the room was a round concrete platform one meter high covered with a metal disk. Several cables—Urm noted the exact number—led from the platform to the instrument panels around the walls, and a certain number of shining, jointed rods hung above the lid from the ceiling, each terminating in a claw much like his own. The platform was surrounded by a screen of wire mesh.

Urm, walking noiselessly over the tile floor, approached the screen and moved around it, his accumulators screaming in protest as he catalogued for posterity the exact number of openings in the mesh. There was no passage through the screen so he made one for himself as he walked effortlessly through it, the torn copper wire clinging to his body here and there like bits of cobweb. He paused warily two paces from the platform. His spherical head moved from left to right. The platform radiated heat and infra-red, and Urm's counters were now recording a fairly high intensity of ultra-radiation. As he bent over the lid, his optical receptors saw only the circle of metal, but in the X-ray and gamma-ray spec-

trum the lid disappeared and beneath it yawned a narrow bottomless pit filled with radioactive dust. The pressure of radiation was not yet great enough to trigger Urm's avoidance mechanism. He bent over the platform and lifted the slab of lead in order to examine the source of the rays. A flood of gamma particles blinded him. Along the walls red lights appeared on the instrument panel and a siren screamed a warning. But Urm's avoidance chain had already been activated. The room resounded as the lead shield fell back into place over the pit and Urm turned quickly, grating out the word for "Danger!" in Russian, English, French, Chinese and German, and left the room, a contaminated and a wiser robot.

Stepping over the demolished radiator, Urm found himself on the landing once more. A human was just starting to descend the ten steps hastily. The human was dressed in the familiar lab coat, but its hair was uncommonly long. Urm's olfactory receptors detected a strong floral scent identical with that which occasionally emanated more faintly from the Master. The girl, preoccupied, paused at the top of the stairs, and called testily:

"Who's there? Is that you, Ivanov—?"

"Hello. How are you," was the automatic response of Urm.

The girl screamed as the massive head, with its bulbous red - and - green - lighted quartz

crystal "eyes," loomed up out of the darkness. It had never before happened that a human failed to respond to his grating cordiality in kind. The strange, shrill—certainly inarticulate—response was something new. Urm was definitely interested. The wooden steps groaned and creaked ominously as he advanced toward the young technician, who now backed away from him in horror.

"Back!" she cried.

Urm paused to listen.

"Back! You monster!"

Now the order, "Back!" was known to Urm. On receiving it he was to retreat until the order, "Stop!" was issued. But, in the first place, the present order was given in the wrong timbre of voice, and in the second place his new-found curiosity was censoring all routine reactions not consistent with its gratification. He mounted the last step and found himself at the entrance of a small room.

"Back! Back! Back!" shrieked the retreating girl.

Urm no longer hesitated, but walked into the room at a slower rate, examining his new surroundings with interest. There were chairs, a desk, a drawing-board, a couch and a bookcase. While he amused himself moving drawers in and out and reading aloud the inscriptions on the blueprints piled on the desk, he saw, with his rear optical receptor, that the girl had scrambled around to crouch behind the divan and grab the telephone.

But the little long-haired creature no longer interested him. Stepping over the pile of blueprints and papers he had finished scanning, he turned to the bookcase.

"Nikolai Petrovich? It is I, Galia—Nikolai Petrovich, Urm has broken into our quarters and is—Urm! Your *Urm!*— Did you hear the siren? Well, I met him coming upstairs from the reactor— He must have been there! What? Control must know already— Yes. But he ignored me . . ."

Urm had completed his survey and did not wait for the conclusion of this conversation. Stepping through another door which stood slightly ajar, and closing it behind him, he began moving along a new corridor and suddenly stopped. His radar antennae moved from side to side. On the wall opposite was a large shiny, cold rectangle, appearing as a gray opacity in the infrared, but having a startlingly different appearance in the visible spectrum. In the center of the area was a black figure with a spherical head. His optical range-finder informed him that this apparition was at a distance of twelve meters, eight centimeters, but the radar disputed this information, giving the distance to the rectangle as six meters, four cms. There had never before been such a marked difference in the readings. He approached the rectangle, pausing at each step to note the new

measurements, but the ratio remained the same: distance by visual range equalled distance by radar times two. As he continued to receive and collate further confirming data, he walked straight into the mirror. The visual image of the round-headed apparition disappeared in a shower of broken glass, and Urm, face to face with the blank wall, noted that his visual and radar finders were once again in harmony. That problem having been disposed of, Urm scratched at the plaster with one claw, sniffed it, turned and moved on down the corridor toward another door. Completely ignoring the spectacle, but recording for eternity the visual image of the terrified watchman yanking madly at the alarm-cord, Urm opened the door and stepped out into a blinding snowstorm.

Nikolai Petrovich had scarcely put down the receiver when Piskunov dashed into the anteroom and began hastily putting on his fur greatcoat. Nikolai Petrovich called to his senior engineer.

"Where are you going?"

"It's Urm, isn't it? I'm going after him, of course!"

"Wait a minute!" cried Nikolai Petrovich. He hurriedly relayed the information Galia had phoned in. "We have to plan a course of action! If this iron behemoth—"

"He didn't stop!?" cried Piskunov, stunned.

"—starts to frolic around the power-house—"

"We'll be lucky if he confines himself to that area!" broke in Piskunov. "What about the other lab, the warehouses, the workers' settlement?"

Nikolai Petrovich was thinking fast as Piskunov impatiently stepped from one foot to the other at the open door. Meanwhile the others from Central Control dashed in ready to give their assistance.

"No damage to the reactor!" panted Kostenko. "Let's go on out together and nail that monster!"

Piskunov looked annoyed. Ryabkin, who was rummaging through the closet for his fur coat cried angrily, "Oh, sure! Just 'nail him!' What are you going to nail him by, the seat of his pants? He weighs half a ton and can carry his own weight in either claw! You keep your bright ideas to yourself, Kostenko, until you've been around a little longer—"

"I'll tell you what we'll do!" hurriedly interposed Nikolai Petrovich, "you, Ryabkin, go to the depot and mobilize the bulldozer crew—I hope they're not all at the club in town— Get at least three— How about it, Piskunov?"

"Yes—but hurry!"

"Bring the tracks over to the area between the Institute and the power-house! Piskunov—run to the Institute— Take Kostenko with you— Find out where Urm is— Stop him if you can, or wait for the bulldozers— All clear? Let's go! I'll rouse the

student technicians in the dorm—"

They all crowded through the door together, jostling each other and stepping on each other's feet. Kostenko lost his footing on the stairs as Ryabkin stumbled against him, and both men fell into a snow drift.

"Damn!"

"What happened?"

"No— We're all right!"

A fierce wind, catching up the dry snow and whirling it about, moaned plaintively through the high tension lines and whistled through the lattice-work of the masts. Except for the elongated rectangles of dim yellowish light that splashed across the snow from the windows of their quarters, and the dormitory a hundred meters away, the inky black of night was all but impenetrable. They could see the lights of the Institute in the distance only faintly.

"Be careful," warned Nikolai Petrovich, "don't stick your necks out needlessly!" He struck off toward the dormitory. Ryabkin started toward the tractor depot, stumbled again and floundered through a snow drift, cursing fluently:

"Damn this Siberian blizzard! Damn this pig of an Urm, and everything connected with him —" Then the trail of profanity and his white-coated figure disappeared in the swirling snow that fell about him.

Piskunov and Kostenko started for the Institute. Kostenko shivered a little.

"I don't understand," he said, "what are the bulldozers for?"

"What would you use—butterfly nets?" asked Piskunov gloomily.

"Well, I just don't understand— Do they want to destroy Urm?"

Piskunov sighed.

"Urm is a unique mechanism, the product of seven years' intensive creative work in the field of advanced cybernetics. How can we wish to see him destroyed?"

Lifting the skirts of his Siberian greatcoat, he waddled ahead through the snow drifts. Embarrassed and silent, Kostenko followed him. Ignoring the roadway, Piskunov cut across country on a bee-line to the Institute. As they clambered through an excavation, Kostenko heard Piskunov muttering and grunting to himself. It was hard going as they stumbled over and around piles of ice-coated bricks and pipes, but the glimpses they got of the lights from the Institute and the power-house through the blinding curtain of snow kept them on course.

Piskunov knew Urm as no one else in the Institute knew him. He had installed every electrode, lens, micro-transistor and couplings; every nut and bolt in the intricate mechanism. It was possible to predict every move Urm would make under normal circumstances. But there it was! Urm had suddenly taken off, left the basement room and run

wild. Why? The robot's behavior was controlled through his "brain," an extremely complicated and delicate network of germanium and platinum membranes and ferrite. If the ordinary computer has scores of thousands of trigger-relays, elementary units capable of receiving, storing, and transmitting impulses, then in the brain of Urm there were no less than 10 million logic cells. In these cells were programmed reactions to a multitude of situations in many variations in environment; and an enormous range of operation and activity was predetermined. But what could have occasioned such a drastic alteration in his program? The atomic engine? The engine was surrounded by a screen of zircon, gadolinium and borax-steel, a barrier which not a single neutron, not a single gamma quantum could penetrate. A new program? Piskunov had supervised the installation of the program himself—

"See anything?" puffed Kostenko, as he fought his way up to Piskunov and tried to peer ahead. "Maybe Urm's changed his mind and gone back home—"

"Changed his mind!" burst out Piskunov. "That's *it*! A spontaneous reaction!"

"What—?"

"Of course! But who would have thought—"

"Look!" cried Kostenko suddenly, pointing ahead.

The leaden sky was suddenly illuminated by an intense, vi-

brant blue glare in which the Institute buildings and the power-house stood out starkly.

"The transformer shack!" shouted Piskunov. "It's right across from the reactor tower! That's where Urm is—and the watchmen! Come on! Run!"

This was easy to say, but the wind tore at them furiously, and their boots, enmeshed in the drifting snow, stumbled over every irregularity in the ground. They fell, rose, fell again as they tried to increase their pace.

"Hurry! Hurry!" cried Piskunov. Tears streamed from his eyes and froze in his eyelashes, half-blinding him as he strove against the blast. Yet he seized Kostenko by the arm and dragged him along, still muttering breathlessly, "Hurry! Hurry!"

A searchlight winked on from a tower off to their left and began sweeping across the snow plucking objects from the gloom as it impaled in turn mounds of snow, the masts of the high-tension wires, and flashed along the outside of the wall surrounding the Institute, fastening itself motionless on the gate. Small dark shapes could be seen moving near the gate.

"Who's there?" asked the breathless Kostenko.

"The guards." Piskunov stopped long enough to brush the ice from his eyelashes as he puffed. "The gates—they've locked them! Good boys—that means Urm is confined to the grounds!"

The alarm was spreading.

Two more searchlights were gliding back and forth along the wall of the Institute revealing the snow swirling up in dust-devils as the lashing winds raced along the barrier. A new sound was heard in the distance. Over the howling of the wind came the roar of motors as several huge bulldozers, their headlights gleaming, moved out of the garage behind them to the right.

As the bulldozers fanned out across the roadway and lumbered down toward them, Piskunov counted the headlights.

"Five against one!" he muttered.

"What?" asked Kostenko.

Piskunov said "Kostenko, we may be about to witness the most unique capture in the annals of the chase."

But now something had changed. They did not grasp the situation at once. The storm was raging as bitterly as ever, the dust-devils of snow still swirled up from the ground, the bulldozers chugged ahead confidently. But the searchlight beams had stopped moving. They were now frozen together in a triple beam on the gate as if in horror at the discovery that the massive door was gaping open, unattended.

"What the devil—?" gasped Kostenko.

"He couldn't have—!"

Piskunov did not finish. Acting on a common impulse, they both broke for the Institute. They were only 200 meters from the gate when Piskunov, blinded

by the snow, his eyes fixed only on his objective, blundered into a man holding a rifle. The rifleman cried out in terror and tried to flee. Piskunov grabbed him by the arm.

The guard, recognizing a fellow human, let fly a volley of relieved profanity.

"He got away!" he growled, "got away. Tore down the gate and was gone! I'm off to warn the settlement and try to get help!"

"Which way did he go?"

The guard waved his hand toward the highway. "That way, I think."

"He'll run straight into the bulldozers!" cried Piskunov. "Let's go!"

Suddenly, out of the swirling murk, issued a vast and formless something. The red and green "eyes" of Urm flashed at them blindingly, and a harsh, toneless voice uttered the words, "Hello. How are you."

"Urm! Stop!" shouted Piskunov in despair.

Kostenko saw the guard break into a run and Piskunov raise his clenched fist and flail it helplessly in the wind as the titanic steam-enshrouded figure of Urm passed them heedlessly, moving inexorably on his mighty legs and disappearing into the snowy darkness.

As he stepped out into the snowstorm, Urm carefully closed the door behind him and paused. All around him there were sounds, movements, radiations.

To him the night was illuminated by a fairyland kaleidoscope of radio waves. Thirteen meters ahead was a low, squat building whose walls emitted bright infra-red light. His acoustical receptors picked up a low-pitched, steady hum which also seemed to come from the building. Snowflakes swirled about him. Those that touched him instantly melted and evaporated.

Urm moved toward the building, heading directly for the entrance which appeared through an opening in a row of low evergreens surrounding the building. Urm paused to pluck up one of the trees by its roots and examine it thoroughly before entering.

As he carefully closed the door behind him, he saw two humans at a table across the room jump to their feet and stare at him.

"Hello. How are you," he asked.

"C — Comrade Piskunov — ?" stuttered one of the men insanely.

"Comrade Piskunov is out," responded Urm calmly. "Is there any message?"

Humans no longer interested Urm. His attention, however, was drawn to a small furry creature which had backed into the opposite corner. Animate; strong odor; non-human; classified Urm methodically. He bent over the trembling beast.

"Hello. How are you." He asked in all his languages.

"R-r-r-r!" answered the dog,

baring his fangs and backing closer to the wall.

Completely preoccupied with the dog, Urm ignored the swift movements of the guards who had by this time barricaded themselves behind the up-turned table and drawn their side arms. Whining plaintively, its tail between its legs, the mongrel tried to sidle past the monster. But Urm was too quick for him. Urm was too quick for any animal in the world. One arm flashed out and caught the dog just as a shot rang out deafeningly in the small room. A bullet slammed against Urm's back-plates and ricocheted into the wall. Bits of broken plaster trickled to the floor.

"Sidorenko!" cried the other guard, "cut it out!"

Releasing the terrified animal, Urm turned and gazed at the men who, though white as ghosts, still held their pistols ready. As Urm sniffed eagerly at the new scent of smokeless powder, the dog found refuge between the legs of the guards. Satisfied that he had noted everything of interest in this room, Urm turned to the other door, taking note of the emblem above it, a skull and cross-bones pierced by a bolt of lightning. The stupefied guards watched him fumble with the latch with his pincer-claws. The door opened.

"Stop!" cried the guards in unison, coming to their senses. Dashing after him as they realized the danger to the trans-

formers, they grabbed him by the arms, screaming new commands. But, for Urm, they had ceased to exist, and the frantic pulling and tugging made no impression on him at all. They might as well have tried to stop a tank. One of them, pushing his partner aside, emptied his pistol, point blank, at Urm's enormous head. The chamber reverberated to the sounds of the shots and the mad whine of the ricocheting bullets. Urm staggered a moment, off-balance under the impact of the full charge of the automatic. The ebonite shell of his right acoustic receptor flew into smithereens. One radar antenna snapped off and dangled crazily by a wire. The crash of shattered glass joined the uproar as some of the glancing bullets found their way out through the skylights.

Urm had no way of knowing he was under attack. He had no generalized instinct for self-preservation, and certainly no program directing him to attack or harm a human. As the last bullet glanced off his head he merely turned to investigate the source of the noise and the fresh smell of powder. The two guards, not having been informed of the limitations of his reaction-pattern, were aware only that he was impervious to bullets and that he was now reaching for the smoking pistol as he advanced toward them. They fled to call up reinforcements. Urm could have overhauled them

in two strides except that his attention was caught by a new smell. A bullet had bounced into the case of one of the transformers. The odor of burning insulation attracted Urm. He investigated the huge multi-ribbed box, touching it here and there with his claws.

Outside, the fleeing men were suddenly transfixed by a sharp *Crack!* and a dazzling blue flash exploded through every window and doorway of the shack, reaching for the clouds as it burst up through the skylights. Then a moment of absolute darkness and quiet. Then pandemonium as the sirens broke loose again, and the searchlight came on. They broke for the gate, running as fast as their legs would permit.

As Urm came out of the shack and closed the door behind him, he could see the main gate, outlined by the searchlight, as it closed behind the two guards. He made his way methodically to the gate. His arrival was heralded by a chorus of shouts from the humans outside.

"Hello. How are you," he said as he tried to open the gate.

"Back!" Then: "Careful—Don't shoot at this devil!" It was Sidorenko, the trigger-happy guard, who shouted.

"Hello. How are you," answered Urm. This was another of those doors that needed a little push to make it open. Urm obliged. The door protested, resisted, then gave. The guards scattered as Urm plunged past

them and disappeared into the snowstorm.

He was hardly able to keep his balance on the uneven ground. Once as his foot slipped through the snow into a hole, he fell heavily. He had never fallen before, but he was up in an instant, raising himself first by his arms, then by his jointed legs. He stood a moment to get his bearings. To the left were several moving lights coming toward him. In between Urm and these lights were three human figures, and beyond both were the twinkling lights of the settlement. Urm looked toward the moving lights which closer observation revealed to be mechanical devices carrying men as they lumbered along the road. Urm walked toward the road, greeting the three men in passing. He noted that one of them was the Master, but his attention was riveted on the procession up ahead.

He stumbled up onto a flat, hard surface. Bright lights flooded the area. A huge metal monster, carrying a shield before it came close to him and stopped, snorting fiercely. Urm studied it carefully. He noted that other machines had left the road on either side and were circling around him. He sniffed the mixture of aromas, observed the infra-red radiation, and detected sparks. A human jumped down from a place behind the shield and started toward him.

"Hello," said Urm, "how are you."

As Nikolai Petrovich jumped down from the cab of the bulldozer, the driver cried out in alarm.

"Where are you going, Comrade Engineer?"

At this moment Piskunov staggered up to the highway. He caught Nikolai Petrovich by the arm and leaned on him a moment to catch his breath. Then, motioning the other to wait, he stepped around the scoop and stopped in front of Urm. The robot loomed over the man like a colossus, his polished trunk gleaming in the lights, a cloud of steam rising around him, his great round head, minus one "ear" and one antenna, resembling a grotesque Halloween mask as it moved rhythmically from side to side, his optical receptors sensitive to every movement the Master made.

"Urm!" said the Master loudly.

Urm came to attention, his arms at his sides.

"Prepare for instructions!"

"I am ready," replied Urm.

In the background, someone tittered nervously.

Piskunov stepped forward and placed his bare hand on Urm's chest. There was a switch near the head disconnecting Urm's cybernetic unit from the power unit. If he could reach it, Urm would be paralyzed, unable to translate reactions into movement. Did Urm know? Piskunov reached for the switch.

Maybe Urm knew. Or maybe

his counter still registered a source of residual radioactivity around his head and shoulders sufficient to be harmful to man.

"Look out!" shouted Nikolai Petrovich. Too late. Urm had suddenly swung his trunk ninety degrees. Was his cry of "Danger!" drowned out by the engines of the bulldozers as the drivers jammed down the accelerators? Piskunov was thrown to the ground, dazed, but unhurt. Nikolai Petrovich raced to his side and dragged him out of the way as Urm started around the scoop of the bulldozer. But Ryabkin's crew were ready for him. A second bulldozer came up at right angles to the first. Their scoops formed a corner. Urm turned and met a third scoop head on. Urm regarded these metal shields as a kind of door. He pushed on the third scoop in order to open it. While he did so, the first 'dozer came up behind him and gently pinned his body between its plow and the one Urm was trying to open. Urm was trapped.

Pinned between the two bulldozers as if he were in the jaws of a vise, Urm was held motionless, but his arms were still free. His head turned like a classroom globe as he took in the situation.

"Comrade Piskunov!" yelled one of the drivers, "what do we do now?"

"Comrade Piskunov is out," replied Urm. "Is there any message." And he dealt one of the

scoops a resounding blow with his claw.

Meanwhile Piskunov had scrambled to his feet, shaking off Nikolai Petrovich's assistance. Ryabkin and Kostenko joined them. Urm had decided that the confining steel would have to be destroyed so that he could be free to continue his research. Showers of sparks flew as he belabored the snow-plows with steady rhythmic blows, like a boxer working with a punching bag.

"We'll have to do something fast!" cried Ryabkin, "or he'll cripple himself!"

Piskunov started to clamber over the nearest bulldozer. Ryabkin grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

"What are you doing?" demanded Piskunov, "he won't obey! I've got to reach that switch!"

"What are *you* doing?" retorted Ryabkin, "do you think we're going to let you jump into that cement-mixer again? You're the only one with a thorough knowledge of Urm's construction and maintenance— Let someone else go!"

"You're right!" put in Nikolai Petrovich, "I'll go!"

One of the crewmen jumped into the discussion. "Why not send one of us?" he demanded. "We're in better shape than any of you!"

"I'll go," offered Kostenko, not without reluctance, but with determination.

"Quiet!" roared Nikolai Pe-

trovich. "Just you fellows hold on to Piskunov while I get this over with." Tearing off his greatcoat, he mounted the tractor.

"Let go of me!" raged Piskunov, struggling in the grip of Ryabkin and Kostenko. Meanwhile, Urm was maintaining his steady attack, his arms dealing trip-hammer blows to the vise that still held him.

"And each arm packs a thousand-pound wallop!" recalled Kostenko in awe.

Nikolai Petrovich, his teeth clenched, crouched between the bulldozers at Urm's feet, and looked for an opening. The clash and clatter rang deafeningly in his ears. He knew that Urm had seen him, was watching him as his massive head moved around to scan the area. He dared not reach up for fear of being maimed by Urm's rapidly moving arms.

"Quiet, you scoundrel!" screamed Nikolai Petrovich in an agony of frustration.

Suddenly the monotonous clash of steel on steel was punctuated by a new sound. There was a sharp *crack*. Something had started to give way. In the grip of Kostenko and Ryabkin, Piskunov's body suddenly went rigid. Nikolai Petrovich, made reckless by the feeling that it was now or never, lunged upward under the sweeping arm as it descended toward the confining walls of steel. But even in the midst of his desperate leap,

the arm wavered and collapsed helplessly at Urm's side. The clamor was stilled, and once again the wild moan of the wind could be heard over the coughing of the engines. Unopposed by any movement on the part of Urm, Nikolai Petrovich found the switch with his gloved hand, and snapped it. The red and green lights behind Urm's eyes slowly faded. His one radar antenna quivered and was still.

"That's that!" said Piskunov and bowed his head.

He did not hear the ensuing fragments of conversation as, with forced jocularity, his companions gave voice to their relief. Nikolai Petrovich, assisted by the crewmen, climbed back over the bulldozer and jumped down next to the silent Piskunov. He didn't say anything. Suddenly Piskunov embraced him in a bear hug and slapped him on the back.

"And now," he burst out, "let's get him back to the lab, abolish that reaction pattern and make a real Urm out of him!"

"What really happened to Urm?" asked Kostenko.

Nikolai Petrovich, tired and pale after his exertions during a sleepless night, nevertheless consented to explain:

"Urm," he said, "was designed on order from the Interplanetary Communication Bureau. He differs from others—even the most complicated cybernetic machines—in that he is capable of responding to stimuli which cannot be anticipated even by

the most skilfully worked out program. Take, for instance, the planet Venus. Who knows the exact environment? It is probably under water, but it may be deserts or steaming jungle. So far it is impossible to send a human there—too dangerous. It was decided to send Urms instead. But how can we determine a program for them? At the present state of cybernetics, we cannot design a machine that can think abstractly—”

“What do you mean?”

“Well—take a dog, for instance. For the machine, there is no abstract, generalized ‘dog.’ There is only this dog, that dog, the other dog. If Urm’s program includes a pre-set reaction to a poodle, he will be unable to react to a wolf hound. Herein lies the basic deficiency of the most brilliantly conceived, the most complex cybernetic machine as compared to the stupidest human alive: the inability of the machine to deal in mental abstractions.

“Piskunov tried to surmount this obstacle by creating a partly self-programming machine.

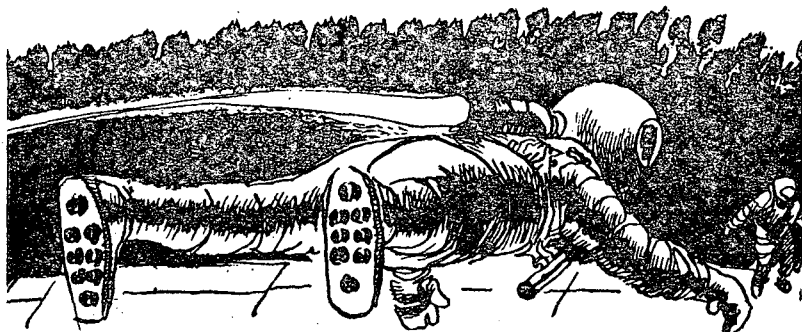
Among the ordinary circuits, a special reflex chain was built into Urm’s brain whose function is to stimulate *empty* memory cells. Piskunov reasoned that with the ability to accumulate new impressions, Urm would be able, without further human help, to select appropriate lines of conduct as each new situation arose: the most perfect analogue of human consciousness—initiative—on Earth.

“Unfortunately, Piskunov did not foresee that the special reflex chain might overcome the original program under certain conditions. Under these conditions, Urm’s behavior of course ceased to be predictable—or controllable.”

“What’s to be done now?”

“We’ll have to find another way. But never fear; Urm will succeed. He will yet be the first to sound the depths of the oceans of Venus, to tread the sands and rocks of other worlds; he and his kind will stand where man may never walk—and in the end, will lead us to the stars!”

THE END



INITIATIVE

19

HUNTER PATROL

By H. BEAM PIPER and JOHN J. McGUIRE

*Many men have dreamed of world peace, but
none have been able to achieve it. If one
man did have that power, could mankind
afford to pay the price?*

AT THE crest of the ridge, Benson stopped for an instant, glancing first at his wrist-watch and then back over his shoulder. It was 0539; the barrage was due in eleven minutes, at the spot where he was now standing. Behind, on the long northeast slope, he could see the columns of black oil smoke rising from what had been the Pan-Soviet advance supply dump. There was a great deal of firing going on, back there; he wondered if the Commies had managed to corner a few of his men, after the patrol had accomplished its mission and scattered, or if a couple of Communist units were shooting each other up in mutual mistaken identity. The result would be about the same in either case—reserve units would be disorganized, and some men would have been pulled back

from the front line. His dozen-odd UN regulars and Turkish partisans had done their best to simulate a paratroop attack in force. At least, his job was done; now to execute that classic infantry maneuver described as, "Let's get the hell outa here." This was his last patrol before rotation home. He didn't want anything unfortunate to happen.

There was a little ravine to the left; the stream which had cut it in the steep southern slope of the ridge would be dry at this time of year, and he could make better time, and find protection in it from any chance shots when the interdictory barrage started. He hurried toward it and followed it down to the valley that would lead toward the front—the thinly-held section of the Communist lines, and the UN lines beyond, where fresh

troops were waiting to jump from their holes and begin the attack.

There was something wrong about this ravine, though. At first, it was only a vague presentiment; growing stronger as he followed the dry gully down to the valley below. Something he had smelled, or heard, or seen, without conscious recognition. Then, in the dry sand where the ravine debouched into the valley, he saw faint tank-tracks—only one pair. There was something wrong about the vines that mantled one side of the ravine, too . . .

An instant later, he was diving to the right, breaking his fall with the butt of his auto-carbine, rolling rapidly toward the cover of a rock, and as he did so, the thinking part of his mind recognized what was wrong. The tank-tracks had ended against the vine-grown side of the ravine, what he had smelled had been lubricating oil and petrol, and the leaves on some of the vines hung upside down.

Almost at once, from behind the vines, a tank's machine guns snarled at him, clipping the place where he had been standing, then shifting to rage against the sheltering rock. With a sudden motor-roar, the muzzle of a long tank-gun pushed out through the vines, and then the low body of a tank with a red star on the turret came rumbling out of the camouflaged bay. The machine guns kept him pinned

behind the rock; the tank swerved ever so slightly so that its wide left tread was aimed directly at him, then picked up speed. Aren't even going to waste a shell on me, he thought.

Futilely, he let go a clip from his carbine, trying to hit one of the vision-slits; then rolled to one side, dropped out the clip, slapped in another. There was a shimmering blue mist around him. If he only hadn't used his last grenade, back there at the supply-dump . . .

The strange blue mist became a flickering radiance that ran through all the colors of the spectrum and became an utter, impenetrable blackness . . .

There were voices in the blackness, and a softness under him, but under his back, when he had been lying on his stomach, as though he were now on a comfortable bed. They got me alive, he thought; now comes the brainwashing!

He cracked one eye open imperceptibly. Lights, white and glaring, from a ceiling far above; walls as white as the lights. Without moving his head, he opened both eyes and shifted them from right to left. Vaguely, he could see people and, behind them, machines so simply designed that their functions were unguessable. He sat up and looked around groggily. The people, their costumes—definitely not Pan-Soviet uniforms—and the room and its machines, told him nothing. The hardness un-

der his right hip was a welcome surprise; they hadn't taken his pistol from him! Feigning even more puzzlement and weakness, he clutched his knees with his elbows and leaned his head forward on them, trying to collect his thoughts.

"We shall have to give up, Gregory," a voice trembled with disappointment.

"Why, Anthony?" The new voice was deeper, more aggressive.

"Look. Another typical reaction; retreat to the foetus."

Footsteps approached. Another voice, discouragement heavily weighting each syllable: "You're right. He's like all the others. We'll have to send him back."

"And look for no more?" The voice he recognized as Anthony faltered between question and statement.

A babel of voices, in dispute; then, clearly, the voice Benson had come to label as Gregory, cut in:

"I will never give up!"

He raised his head; there was something in the timbre of that voice reminding him of his own feelings in the dark days when the UN had everywhere been reeling back under the Pan-Soviet hammer-blows.

"Anthony!" Gregory's voice again; Benson saw the speaker; short, stocky, gray-haired, stubborn lines about the mouth. The face of a man chasing an illusive but not uncapturable dream.

"That means nothing." A tall thin man, too lean for the tunic-

like garment he wore, was shaking his head.

Deliberately, trying to remember his college courses in psychology, he forced himself to accept, and to assess, what he saw as reality. He was on a small table, like an operating table; the whole place looked like a medical lab or a clinic. He was still in uniform; his boots had soiled the white sheets with the dust of Armenia. He had all his equipment, including his pistol and combat-knife; his carbine was gone, however. He could feel the weight of his helmet on his head. The room still rocked and swayed a little, but the faces of the people were coming into focus.

He counted them, saying each number to himself: one, two, three, four, five men; one woman. He swung his feet over the edge of the table, being careful that it would be between him and the others when he rose, and began inching his right hand toward his right hip, using his left hand, on his brow, to misdirect attention.

"I would classify his actions as arising from conscious effort at cortico-thalamic integration," the woman said, like an archaeologist who has just found a K-ration tin at the bottom of a neolithic kitchen-midden. She had the peculiarly young-old look of the spinster teachers with whom Benson had worked before going to the war.

"I want to believe it, but I'm

afraid to," another man for whom Benson had no name-association said. He was portly, gray-haired, arrogant-faced; he wore a short black jacket, with a jewelled zipper-pull, and striped trousers.

Benson cleared his throat. "Just who are you people?" he inquired. "And just where am I?"

Anthony grabbed Gregory's hand and pumped it frantically.

"I've dreamed of the day when I could say this!" he cried. "Congratulations, Gregory!"

That touched off another bedlam, of joy, this time, instead of despair. Benson hid his amusement at the facility with which all of them were discovering in one another the courage, vision and stamina of true patriots and pioneers. He let it go on for a few moments, hoping to glean some clue. Finally, he interrupted.

"I believe I asked a couple of questions," he said, using the voice he reserved for sergeants and second lieutenants. "I hate to break up this mutual admiration session, but I would appreciate some answers. This isn't anything like the situation I last remember . . ."

"He remembers!" Gregory exclaimed. "That confirms your first derivation by symbolic logic, and it strengthens the validity of the second . . ."

The schoolteacherish woman began jabbering excitedly; she ran through about a paragraph

of what was pure gobbledegook to Benson, before the man with the arrogant face and the jewelled zipper-pull broke in on her.

"Save that for later, Paula," he barked. "I'd be very much interested in your theories about why memories are unimpaired when you time-jump forward and lost when you reverse the process, but let's stick to business. We have what we wanted; now let's use what we have."

"I never liked the way you made your money," a dark-faced, cadaverous man said, "but when you talk, it makes sense. Let's get on with it."

Benson used the brief silence which followed to study the six. With the exception of the two who had just spoken, there was the indefinable mark of the fanatic upon all of them—people fanatical about different things, united for different reasons in a single purpose. It reminded him sharply of some teachers' committee about to beard a school-board with an unpopular and expensive recommendation.

Anthony—the oldest of the lot, in a knee-length tunic—turned to Gregory.

"I believe you had better . . ." he began.

"As to who we are, we'll explain that, partially, later. As for your question, 'Where am I?' that will have to be rephrased. If you ask, 'When and where am I?' I can furnish a rational answer. In the temporal dimension, you are fifty years future-

ward of the day of your death; spatially, you are about eight thousand miles from the place of your death, in what is now the World Capitol, St. Louis."

Nothing in the answer made sense but the name of the city. Benson chuckled.

"What happened; the Cardinals conquer the world? I knew they had a good team, but I didn't think it was that good."

"No, no," Gregory told him earnestly. "The government isn't a theocracy. At least not yet. But if The Guide keeps on insisting that only beautiful things are good and that he is uniquely qualified to define beauty, watch his rule change into just that."

"I've been detecting symptoms of religious paranoia, messianic delusions, about his public statements . . ." the woman began.

"Idolatry!" another member of the group, who wore a black coat fastened to the neck, and white neck-bands, rasped. "Idolatry in deed, as well as in spirit!"

The sense of unreality, partially dispelled, began to return. Benson dropped to the floor and stood beside the table, getting a cigarette out of his pocket and lighting it.

"I made a joke," he said, putting his lighter away. "The fact that none of you got it has done more to prove that I am fifty years in the future than anything any of you could say." He

went on to explain who the St. Louis Cardinals were.

"Yes; I remember! Baseball!" Anthony exclaimed. "There is no baseball, now. The Guide will not allow competitive sports; he says that they foster the spirit of violence . . ."

The cadaverous man in the blue jacket turned to the man in the black garment of similar cut.

"You probably know more history than any of us," he said, getting a cigar out of his pocket and lighting it. He lighted it by rubbing the end on the sole of his shoe. "Suppose you tell him what the score is." He turned to Benson. "You can rely on his dates and happenings; his interpretation's strictly capitalist, of course," he said.

Black-jacket shook his head. "You first, Gregory," he said. "Tell him how he got here, and then I'll tell him why."

"I believe," Gregory began, "that in your period, fiction writers made some use of the subject of time-travel. It was not, however, given serious consideration, largely because of certain alleged paradoxes involved, and because of an elementalistic and objectifying attitude toward the whole subject of time. I won't go into the mathematics and symbolic logic involved, but we have disposed of the objections; more, we have succeeded in constructing a time-machine, if you want to call it that. We prefer to call it a temporal-spatial displacement field generator."

"It's really very simple," the woman called Paula interrupted. "If the universe is expanding, time is a widening spiral; if contracting, a diminishing spiral; if static, a uniform spiral. The possibility of pulsation was our only worry . . ."

"That's no worry," Gregory reproved her. "I showed you that the rate was too slow to have an effect on . . ."

"Oh, nonsense; you can measure something which exists within a microsecond, but where is the instrument to measure a temporal pulsation that may require years . . .? You haven't come to that yet."

"Be quiet, both of you!" the man with the black coat and the white bands commanded. "While you argue about vanities, thousands are being converted to the godlessness of The Guide, and other thousands of his dupes are dying, unprepared to face their Maker!"

"All right, you invented a time-machine," Benson said. "In civvies, I was only a high school chemistry teacher. I can tell a class of juniors the difference between H_2O and H_2SO_4 , but the theory of time-travel is wasted on me . . . Suppose you just let me ask the questions; then I'll be sure of finding out what I don't know. For instance, who won the war I was fighting in, before you grabbed me and brought me here? The Commies?"

"No, the United Nations," Anthony told him. "At least,

they were the least exhausted when both sides decided to quit."

"Then what's this dictatorship . . . The Guide? Extreme Rightist?"

"Walter, you'd better tell him," Gregory said.

"We damn near lost the war," the man in the black jacket and striped trousers said, "but for once, we won the peace. The Soviet Bloc was broken up—India, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Russia, the Ukraine, all the Satellite States. Most of them turned into little dictatorships, like the Latin American countries after the liberation from Spain, but they were personal, non-ideological, generally benevolent, dictatorships, the kind that can grow into democracies, if they're given time."

"Capitalistic dictatorships, he means," the cadaverous man in the blue jacket explained.

"Be quiet, Carl," Anthony told him. "Let's not confuse this with any class-struggle stuff."

"Actually, the United Nations rules the world," Walter continued. "What goes on in the Ukraine or Latvia or Manchuria is about analogous to what went on under the old United States government in, let's say, Tammany-ruled New York. But here's the catch. The UN is ruled absolutely by one man."

"How could that happen? In my time, the UN had its functions so subdivided and compartmented that it couldn't even run a war properly. Our army

commanders were making war by systematic disobedience."

"The charter was changed shortly after . . . er, that is, after . . ." Walter was fumbling for words.

"After my death," Benson finished politely. "Go on. Even with a changed charter, how did one man get all the powers into his hands?"

"By sorcery!" black-coat-and-white-bands fairly shouted. "By the help of his master, Satan!"

"You know, there are times when some such theory tempts me," Paula said.

"He was a big moneybags," Carl said. "He bribed his way in. "See, New York was bombed flat. Where the old UN buildings were, it's still hot. So The Guide donated a big tract of land outside St. Louis, built these buildings—we're in the basement of one of them, right now, if you want a good laugh—and before long, he had the whole organization eating out of his hand. They just voted him into power, and the world into slavery."

Benson looked around at the others, who were nodding in varying degrees of agreement.

"Substantially, that's it. He managed to convince everybody of his altruism, integrity and wisdom," Walter said. "It was almost blasphemous to say anything against him. I really don't understand how it happened . . ."

"Well, what's he been doing with his power?" Benson asked. "Wise things, or stupid ones?"

"I could be general, and say

that he has deprived all of us of our political and other liberties. It is best to be specific," Anthony said. "Grégory?"

"My own field—dimensional physics—hasn't been interfered with much, yet. It's different in other fields. For instance, all research in sonics has been arbitrarily stopped. So has a great deal of work in organic and synthetic chemistry. Psychology is a madhouse of . . . what was the old word, licentiousness? No, ly-senkoism. Medicine and surgery—well, there's a huge program of compulsory sterilization, and another one of eugenic marriage-control. And infants who don't conform to certain physical standards don't survive. Neither do people who have disfiguring accidents beyond the power of plastic surgery."

Paula spoke next. "My field is child welfare. Well, I'm going to show you an audio-visual of an interesting ceremony in a Hindu village, derived from the ancient custom of the suttee. It is the Hindu method of conforming to The Guide's demand that only beautiful children be allowed to grow to maturity."

The film was mercifully brief. Even in spite of the drums and gongs, and the chanting of the crowd, Benson found out how loudly a newborn infant can scream in a fire. The others looked as though they were going to be sick; he doubted if he looked much better.

"Of course, we are a more

practical and mechanical-minded people, here and in Europe," Paula added, holding down her gorge by main strength. "We have lethal-gas chambers that even Hitler would have envied."

"I am a musician," Anthony said. "A composer. If Gregory thinks that the sciences are controlled, he should try to write even the simplest piece of music. The extent of censorship and control over all the arts, and especially music, is incredible." He coughed slightly. "And I have another motive, a more selfish one. I am approaching the compulsory retirement age; I will soon be invited to go to one of the Havens. Even though these Havens are located in the most barren places, they are beauty-spots, verdant beyond belief. It is of only passing interest that, while large numbers of the aged go there yearly, their populations remain constant, and, to judge from the quantities of supplies shipped to them, extremely small."

"They call me Samuel, in this organization," the man in the long black coat said. "Whoever gave me that alias must have chosen it because I am here in an effort to live up to it. Although I am ordained by no church, I fight for all of them. The plain fact is that this man we call The Guide is really the Antichrist!"

"Well, I haven't quite so lofty a motive, but it's good enough to make me willing to finance

this project," Walter said. "It's very simple. The Guide won't let people make money, and if they do, he taxes it away from them. And he has laws to prohibit inheritance; what little you can accumulate, you can't pass on to your children."

"I put up a lot of the money, too, don't forget," Carl told him. "Or the Union did; I'm a poor man, myself." He was smoking an excellent cigar, for a poor man, and his clothes could have come from the same tailor as Walter's. "Look, we got a real Union—the Union of all unions. Every working man in North America, Europe, Australia and South Africa belongs to it. And The Guide has us all hog-tied."

"He won't let you strike," Benson chuckled.

"That's right. And what can we do? Why, we can't even make our closed-shop contracts stick. And as far as getting anything like a pay-raise . . ."

"Good thing. Another pay-raise in some of my companies would bankrupt them, the way The Guide has us under his thumb . . ." Walter began, but he was cut off.

"Well! It seems as though this Guide has done some good, if he's made you two realize that you're both on the same side, and that what hurts one hurts both," Benson said. "When I shipped out for Turkey in '77, neither Labor nor Management had learned that." He looked from one to another of them. "The Guide must have a really

good bodyguard, with all the enemies he's made."

Gregory shook his head. "He lives virtually alone, in a very small house on the UN Capitol grounds. In fact, except for a small police-force, armed only with non-lethal stun-guns, your profession of arms is non-existent."

"I've been guessing what you want me to do," Benson said. "You want this Guide bumped off. But why can't any of you do it? Or, if it's too risky, at least somebody from your own time? Why me?"

"We can't. Everybody in the world today is conditioned against violence, especially the taking of human life," Anthony told him.

"Now, wait a moment!" This time, he was using the voice he would have employed in chiding a couple of Anatolian peasant partisans who were field-stripping a machine gun the wrong way. "Those babies in that film you showed me weren't dying of old age . . ."

"That is not violence," Paula said bitterly. "That is humane beneficence. Ugly people would be unhappy, and would make others unhappy, in a world where everybody else is beautiful."

"And all these oppressive and tyrannical laws," Benson continued. "How does he enforce them, without violence, actual or threatened?"

Samuel started to say something about the Power of the

Evil One; Paula, ignoring him, said:

"I really don't know; he just does it. Mass hypnotism of some sort. I know music has something to do with it, because there is always music, everywhere. This laboratory, for instance, was secretly soundproofed; we couldn't have worked here, otherwise."

"All right. I can see that you'd need somebody from the past, preferably a soldier, whose conditioning has been in favor rather than against violence. I'm not the only one you snatched, I take it?"

"No. We've been using that machine to pick up men from battlefields all over the world and all over history," Gregory said. "Until now, none of them could adjust . . . Uggh!" He shuddered, looking even sicker than when the film was being shown.

"He's thinking," Walter said, "about a French officer from Waterloo who blew out his brains with a pocket-pistol on that table, and an English archer from Agincourt who ran amok with a dagger in here, and a trooper of the Seventh Cavalry from the Custer Massacre."

Gregory managed to overcome his revulsion. "You see, we were forced to take our subjects largely at random with regard to individual characteristics, mental attitudes, adaptability, et cetera." As long as he stuck to high order abstractions, he could control himself. "Aside from their

professional lack of repugnance for violence, we took soldiers from battlefields because we could select men facing immediate death, whose removal from the past would not have any effect upon the casual chain of events affecting the present."

A warning buzzer rasped in Benson's brain. He nodded, poker-faced.

"I can see that," he agreed. "You wouldn't dare do anything to change the past. That was always one of the favorite paradoxes in time-travel fiction . . . Well, I think I have the general picture. You have a dictator who is tyrannizing you; you want to get rid of him; you can't kill him yourselves. I'm opposed to dictators, myself; that—and the Selective Service law, of course—was why I was a soldier. I have no moral or psychological taboos against killing dictators, or anybody else. Suppose I cooperate with you; what's in it for me?"

There was a long silence. Walter and Carl looked at one another inquiringly; the others dithered helplessly. It was Carl who answered.

"Your return to your own time and place."

"And if I don't cooperate with you?"

"Guess when and where else we could send you," Walter said.

Benson dropped his cigarette and tramped it.

"Exactly the same time and place?" he asked.

"Well, the structure of space-time demands . . ." Paula began.

"The spatio-temporal displacement field is capable of identifying that spot—" Gregory pointed to a ten-foot circle in front of a bank of sleek-cabineted, dial-studded machines—"with any set of space-time coordinates in the universe. However, to avoid disruption of the structure of space-time, we must return you to approximately the same point in space-time."

Benson nodded again, this time at the confirmation of his earlier suspicion. Well, while he was alive, he still had a chance.

"All right; tell me exactly what you want me to do."

A third outbreak of bedlam, this time of relief and frantic explanation.

"Shut up, all of you!" For so thin a man, Carl had an astonishing voice. "I worked this out, so let me tell it." He turned to Benson. "Maybe I'm tougher than the rest of them, or maybe I'm not as deeply conditioned. For one thing, I'm tone-deaf. Well, here's the way it is. Gregory can set the machine to function automatically. You stand where he shows you, press the button he shows you, and fifteen seconds later it'll take you forward in time five seconds and about a kilometer in space, to The Guide's office. He'll be at his desk now. You'll have forty-five seconds to do the job, from the time the field collapses around you till it rebuilds. Then you'll

be taken back to your own time again. The whole thing's automatic."

"Can do," Benson agreed. "How do I kill him?"

"I'm getting sick!" Paula murmured weakly. Her face was whiter than her gown.

"Take care of her, Samuel. Both of you'd better get out of here," Gregory said.

"The Lord of Hosts is my strength, He will . . . Uggh!" Samuel gasped.

"Conditioning's getting him, too; we gotta be quick," Carl said. "Here. This is what you'll use." He handed Benson a two-inch globe of black plastic. "Take the damn thing, quick! Little button on the side; press it, and get it out of your hand fast . . ." He retched. "Limited-effect bomb; everything within two-meter circle burned to nothing; outside that, great but not unendurable heat. Shut your eyes when you throw it. Flash almost blinding." He dropped his cigar and turned almost green in the face. Walter had a drink poured and handed it to him. "Uggh! Thanks, Walter." He downed it.

"Peculiar sort of thing for a non-violent people to manufacture," Benson said, looking at the bomb and then putting it in his jacket pocket.

"It isn't a weapon. Industrial; we use it in mining. I used plenty of them, in Walter's iron mines."

He nodded again. "Where do I stand, now?" he asked.

"Right over here." Gregory placed him in front of a small panel with three buttons. "Press the middle one, and step back into the small red circle and stand perfectly still while the field builds up and collapses. Face that way."

Benson drew his pistol and checked it; magazine full, a round in the chamber, safety on.

"Put that horrid thing out of sight!" Anthony gasped. "The . . . the other thing . . . is what you want to use."

"The bomb won't be any good if some of his guards come in before the field re-builds," Benson said.

"He has no guards. He lives absolutely alone. We told you . . ."

"I know you did. You probably believed it, too. I don't. And by the way, you're sending me forward. What do you do about the fact that a time-jump seems to make me pass out?"

"Here. Before you press the button, swallow it." Gregory gave him a small blue pill.

"Well, I guess that's all there is," Gregory continued. "I hope . . ." His face twitched, and he dropped to the floor with a thud. Carl and Walter came forward, dragged him away from the machine.

"Conditioning got him. Getting me, too," Walter said. "Hurry up, man!"

Benson swallowed the pill, pressed the button and stepped

back into the red circle, drawing his pistol and snapping off the safety. The blue mist closed in on him.

This time, however, it did not thicken into blackness. It became luminous, brightening to a dazzle and dimming again to a colored mist, and then it cleared, while Benson stood at raise pistol, as though on a target range. He was facing a big desk at twenty feet, across a thick-piled blue rug. There was a man seated at the desk, a white-haired man with a mustache and a small beard, who wore a loose coat of some glossy plum-brown fabric, and a vividly blue neck-scarf.

The pistol centered on the v-shaped blue under his chin. Deliberately, Benson squeezed, recovered from the recoil, aimed, fired, recovered, aimed, fired. Five seconds gone. The old man slumped across the desk, his arms extended. Better make a good job of it, six, seven, eight seconds; he stepped forward to the edge of the desk, call that fifteen seconds, and put the muzzle to the top of the man's head, firing again and snapping on the safety. There had been something familiar about The Guide's face, but it was too late to check on that, now. There wasn't any face left; not even much head.

A box, on the desk, caught Benson's eye, a cardboard box with an envelope, stamped *Top Secret! For the Guide Only!* taped to it. He holstered his pis-

tol and caught that up, stuffing it into his pocket, in obedience to an instinct to grab anything that looked like intelligence matter while in the enemy's country. Then he stepped back to the spot where the field had deposited him. He had ten seconds to spare; somebody was banging on a door when the blue mist began to gather around him.

He was crouching, the spherical plastic object in his right hand, his thumb over the button, when the field collapsed. Sure enough, right in front of him, so close that he could smell the very heat of it, was the big tank with the red star on its turret. He cursed the sextet of sanctimonious double-crossers eight thousand miles and fifty years away in space-time. The machine guns had stopped—probably because they couldn't be depressed far enough to aim at him, now; that was a notorious fault of some of the newer Pan-Soviet tanks—and he rocked back on his heels, pressed the button, and heaved, closing his eyes. As the thing left his fingers, he knew that he had thrown too hard. His muscles, accustomed to the heavier cast-iron grenades of his experience, had betrayed him. For a moment, he was closer to despair than at any other time in the whole phantasmagoric adventure. Then he was hit, with physical violence, by a wave of almost solid heat. It didn't smell like the heat of the tank's engines; it smelled like molten

metal, with undertones of burned flesh. Immediately, there was a multiple explosion that threw him flat, as the tank's ammunition went up. There were no screams. It was too fast for that. He opened his eyes.

The turret and top armor of the tank had vanished. The two massive treads had been toppled over, one to either side. The body had collapsed between them, and it was running sticky trickles of molten metal. He blinked, rubbed his eyes on the back of his hand, and looked again. Of all the many blasted and burned-out tanks, Soviet and UN, that he had seen, this was the most completely wrecked thing in his experience. And he'd done that with one grenade . . .

At that moment, there was a sudden rushing overhead, and an instant later the barrage began falling beyond the crest of the ridge. He looked at his watch, blinked, and looked again. That barrage was due at 0550; according to the watch, it was 0726. He was sure that, ten minutes ago, when he had looked at it, up there at the head of the ravine, it had been twenty minutes to six. He puzzled about that for a moment, and decided that he must have caught the stem on something and pulled it out, and then twisted it a little, setting the watch ahead. Then, somehow, the stem had gotten pushed back in, starting it at the new setting. That was a pretty far-fetched explanation, but it

was the only one he could think of.

But about this tank, now. He was positive that he could remember throwing a grenade . . . Yet he'd used his last grenade back there at the supply dump. He saw his carbine, and picked it up. That silly blackout he'd had, for a second, there; he must have dropped it. Action was open, empty magazine on the ground where he'd dropped it. He wondered, stupidly, if one of his bullets couldn't have gone down the muzzle of the tank's gun and exploded the shell in the chamber . . . Oh, the hell with it! The tank might have been hit by a premature shot from the barrage which was raging against the far slope of the ridge. He reset his watch by guess and looked down the valley. The big attack would be starting any minute, now, and there would be fleeing Commies coming up the valley ahead of the UN advance. He'd better get himself placed before they started coming in on him.

He stopped thinking about the mystery of the blown-up tank, a solution to which seemed to dance maddeningly just out of his mental reach, and found himself a place among the rocks to wait. Down the valley he could hear everything from pistols to mortars going off, and shouting in three or four racial intonations. After a while, fugitive Communists began coming, many of them without their equipment, stumbling in their haste

and looking back over their shoulders. Most of them avoided the mouth of the ravine and hurried by to the left or right, but one little clump, eight or ten, came up the dry stream-bed, and stopped a hundred and fifty yards from his hiding-place to make a stand. They were Hindus, with outsize helmets over their turbans. Two of them came ahead, carrying a machine gun, followed by a third with a flame-thrower; the others retreated more slowly, firing their rifles to delay pursuit.

Cuddling the stock of his carbine to his cheek, he divided a ten-shot burst between the two machine-gunners, then, as a matter of principle, he shot the man with the flame-thrower. He had a dislike for flame-throwers; he killed every enemy he found with one. The others dropped their rifles and raised their hands, screaming: "Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe! You no shoot, me no shoot!"

A dozen men in UN battle-dress came up and took them prisoner. Benson shouted to them, and then rose and came down to join them. They were British—Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders, advertising the fact by inconspicuous bits of tartan on their uniforms. The subaltern in command looked at him and nodded.

"Captain Benson? We were warned to be on watch for your patrol," he said. "Any of the rest of you lads get out?"

Benson shrugged. "We split up after the attack. You may run into a couple of them. Some are locals and don't speak very good English. I've got to get back to Division, myself; what's the best way?"

"Down that way. You'll overtake a couple of our walking wounded. If you don't mind going slowly, they'll show you the way to advance dressing station, and you can hitch a ride on an ambulance from there."

Benson nodded. Off on the left, there was a flurry of small-arms fire, ending in yells of "Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe!"—the World War IV version of "Kamarad"!

His company was a non-T/O outfit; he came directly under Division command and didn't have to bother reporting to any regimental or brigade commanders. He walked for an hour with half a dozen lightly wounded Scots, rode for another hour on a big cat-truck loaded with casualties of six regiments and four races, and finally reached Division Rear, where both the Division and Corps commanders took time to compliment him on the part his last hunter patrol had played in the now complete breakthrough. His replacement, an equine-faced Spaniard with an imposing display of fruit-salad, was there, too; he solemnly took off the bracelet a refugee Caucasian goldsmith had made for his predecessor's predecessor and gave it to the new commander of what had formerly been

Benson's Butchers. As he had expected, there was also another medal waiting for him.

A medical check at Task Force Center got him a warning; his last patrol had brought him dangerously close to the edge of combat fatigue. Remembering the incidents of the tank and the unaccountably fast watch, and the mysterious box and envelope which he had found in his coat pocket, he agreed, saying nothing about the questions that were puzzling him. The Psychological Department was never too busy to refuse another case; they hunted patients gleefully, each psych-shark seeking in every one proof of his own particular theories. It was with relief that he watched them fill out the red tag which gave him a priority on jet transports for home.

Ankara to Alexandria, Alexandria to Dakar, Dakar to Belém, Belém to the shattered skyline of New York, the "hurry-and-wait" procedures at Fort Carlisle, and, after the usual separation promotion, Major Fred Benson, late of Benson's Butchers, was back at teaching high school juniors the difference between H_2O and H_2SO_4 .

There were two high schools in the city: McKinley High, on the east side, and Dwight Eisenhower High, on the west. A few blocks from McKinley was the Tulip Tavern, where the Eisenhower teachers came in the late afternoons; the McKin-

ley faculty crossed town to do their after-school drinking on the west side. When Benson entered the Tulip Tavern, on a warm September afternoon, he found Bill Myers, the school psychologist, at one of the tables, smoking his pipe, checking over a stack of aptitude test forms, and drinking beer. He got a highball at the bar and carried it over to Bill's table.

"Oh, hi, Fred." The psychologist separated the finished from the unfinished work with a sheet of yellow paper and crammed the whole business into his brief case. "I was hoping somebody'd show up . . ."

Benson lit a cigarette, sipped his highball. They talked at random—school-talk; the progress of the war, now in its twelfth year; personal reminiscences, of the Turkish Theater where Benson had served, and the Madras Beachhead, where Myers had been.

"Bring home any souvenirs?" Myers asked.

"Not much. Couple of pistols, couple of knives, some pictures. I don't remember what all; haven't gotten around to unpacking them, yet . . . I have a sixth of rye and some beer, at my rooms. Let's go around and see what I did bring home."

They finished their drinks and went out.

"What the devil's that?" Myers said, pointing to the cardboard box with the envelope taped to it, when Benson lifted it out of the gray-green locker.

"Bill, I don't know," Benson said. "I found it in the pocket of my coat, on my way back from my last hunter patrol . . . I've never told anybody about this, before."

"That's the damnedest story I've ever heard, and in my racket you hear some honeys," Myers said, when he had finished. "You couldn't have picked that thing up in some other way, deliberately forgotten the circumstances, and fabricated this story about the tank and the grenade and the discrepancy in your watch subconsciously as an explanation?"

"My subconscious is a better liar than that," Benson replied. "It would have cobbled up some kind of a story that would stand up. This business . . ."

"Top Secret! For the Guide Only!" Myers frowned. "That isn't one of our marks, and if it were Soviet, it'd be tri-lingual, Russian, Hindi and Chinese."

"Well, let's see what's in it. I want this thing cleared up. I've been having some of the nastiest dreams, lately . . ."

"Well, be careful; it may be booby-trapped," Myers said urgently.

"Don't worry; I will."

He used a knife to slice the envelope open without untaping it from the box, and exposed five sheets of typewritten onionskin paper. There was no letterhead, no salutation or address-line. Just a mass of chemical formulae, and a concise report on tests. It seemed to be a report

on an improved syrup for a carbonated soft-drink. There were a few cryptic cautionary references to heightened physico-psychological effects.

The box was opened with the same caution, but it proved as innocent of dangers as the envelope. It contained only a half-liter bottle, wax-sealed, containing a dark reddish-brown syrup.

"There's a lot of this stuff I don't dig," Benson said, tapping the sheets of onion-skin. "I don't even scratch the surface of this rigamarole about The Guide. I'm going to get to work on this sample in the lab, at school, though. Maybe we have something, here."

At eight-thirty the next evening, after four and a half hours work, he stopped to check what he had found out.

The school's X-ray, an excellent one, had given him a complete picture of the molecular structure of the syrup. There were a couple of long-chain molecules that he could only believe after two re-examinations and a careful check of the machine, but with the help of the notes he could deduce how they had been put together. They would be the Ingredient Alpha and Ingredient Beta referred to in the notes.

The components of the syrup were all simple and easily procurable with these two exceptions, as were the basic components from which these were made.

The mechanical guinea-pig demonstrated that the syrup contained nothing harmful to human tissue.

Of course, there were the warnings about heightened psycho-physiological effects . . .

He stuck a poison-label on the bottle, locked it up, and went home. The next day, he and Bill Myers got a bottle of carbonated water and mixed themselves a couple of drinks of it. It was delicious—sweet, dry, tart, sour, all of these in alternating waves of pleasure.

"We do have something, Bill," he said. "We have something that's going to give our income-tax experts headaches."

"You have," Myers corrected. "Where do you start fitting me into it?"

"We're a good team, Bill. I'm a chemist, but I don't know a thing about people. You're a psychologist. A real one; not one of these night-school boys. A juvenile psychologist, too. And what age-group spends the most money in this country for soft-drinks?"

Knowing the names of the syrup's ingredients, and what their molecular structure was like, was only the beginning. Gallon after gallon of the School Board's chemicals went down the laboratory sink; Fred Benson and Bill Myers almost lived in the fourth floor lab. Once or twice there were head-shaking warnings from the principal about the dangers of over-work. The watchmen, at all hours,

would hear the occasional twanging of Benson's guitar in the laboratory, and know that he had come to a dead end on something and was trying to think. Football season came and went; basketball season; the inevitable riot between McKinley and Eisenhower rooters; the Spring concerts. The term-end exams were only a month away when Benson and Myers finally did it, and stood solemnly, each with a beaker in either hand and took alternate sips of the original and the drink mixed from the syrup they had made.

"Not a bit of difference, Fred," Myers said. "We have it!"

Benson picked up the guitar and began plunking on it.

"Hey!" Myers exclaimed. "Have you been finding time to take lessons on that thing? I never heard you play as well as that!"

They decided to go into business in St. Louis. It was centrally located, and, being behind more concentric circles of radar and counter-rocket defenses, it was in better shape than any other city in the country and most likely to stay that way. Getting started wasn't hard; the first banker who tasted the new drink—named Evri-Flave, at Myers' suggestion—couldn't dig up the necessary money fast enough. Evri-Flave hit the market with a bang and became an instant success; soon the rain-bow-tinted vending machines

were everywhere, dispensing the slender, slightly flattened bottles and devouring quarters voraciously. In spite of high taxes and the difficulties of doing business in a consumers' economy upon which a war-time economy had been superimposed, both Myers and Benson were rapidly becoming wealthy. The gregarious Myers installed himself in a luxurious apartment in the city; Benson bought a large tract of land down the river toward Carondelet and started building a home and landscaping the grounds.

The dreams began bothering him again, now that the urgency of getting Evri-Flave, Inc., started had eased. They were not dreams of the men he had killed in battle, or, except for one about a huge, hot-smelling tank with a red star on the turret, about the war. Generally, they were about a strange, beautiful, office-room, in which a young man in uniform killed an older man in a plum-brown coat and a vivid blue neck-scarf. Sometimes Benson identified himself with the killer; sometimes with the old man who was killed.

He talked to Myers about these dreams, but beyond generalities about delayed effects of combat fatigue and vague advice to relax, the psychologist, now head of Sales & Promotion of Evri-Flave, Inc., could give him no help.

The war ended three years after the new company was launched. There was a momen-

tary faltering of the economy, and then the work of reconstruction was crying hungrily for all the labor and capital that had been idled by the end of destruction, and more. There was a new flood-tide of prosperity, and Evri-Flave rode the crest. The estate at Carondelet was finished—a beautiful place, surrounded with gardens, fragrant with flowers, full of the songs of birds and soft music from concealed record-players. It made him forget the ugliness of the war, and kept the dreams from returning so frequently. All the world ought to be like that, he thought; beautiful and quiet and peaceful. People surrounded with such beauty couldn't think about war.

All the world could be like that, if only . . .

The UN chose St. Louis for its new headquarters—many of its offices had been moved there after the second and most destructive bombing of New York—and when the city by the Mississippi began growing into a real World Capital, the flow of money into it almost squared overnight. Benson began to take an active part in politics in the new World Sovereignty party. He did not, however, allow his political activities to distract him from the work of expanding the company to which he owed his wealth and position. There were always things to worry about.

"I don't know," Myers said to

him, one evening, as they sat over a bottle of rye in the psychologist's apartment. "I could make almost as much money practicing as a psychiatrist, these days. The whole world seems to be going pure, unadulterated nuts!—That affair in Munich, for instance."

"Yes." Benson grimaced as he thought of the affair in Munich—a Wagnerian concert, which had terminated in an insane orgy of mass suicide. "Just a week after we started our free-sample campaign in South Germany, too . . ."

He stopped short, downing his drink and coughing over it.

"Bill! You remember those sheets of onion-skin in that envelope?"

"The foundation of our fortunes; I wonder where you really did get that . . . Fred!" His eyes widened in horror. "That caution about 'heightened psycho-physiological effects,' that we were never able to understand!"

Benson nodded grimly. "And think of all the crazy cases of mass-hysteria—that baseball-game riot in Baltimore; the time everybody started tearing off each others' clothes in Milwaukee; the sex-orgy in New Orleans. And the sharp uptrend in individual psycho-neurotic and psychotic behavior. All in connection with music, too, and all after Evri-Flave got on the market."

"We'll have to stop it; pull Evri-Flave off the market," My-

ers said. "We can't be responsible for letting this go on."

"We can't stop, either. There's at least a two months' supply out in the hands of jobbers and distributors over whom we have no control. And we have all these contractual obligations, to buy the entire output of the companies that make the syrup for us; if we stop buying, they can sell it in competition with us, as long as they don't infringe our trade-name. And we can't prevent pirating. You know how easily we were able to duplicate that sample I brought back from Turkey. Why, our legal department's kept busy all the time prosecuting unlicensed manufacturers as it is."

"We've got to do something, Fred!" There was almost a whiff of hysteria in Myers' voice.

"We will. We'll start, first thing tomorrow, on a series of tests—just you and I, like the old times at Eisenhower High. First, we want to be sure that Evri-Flave really is responsible. It'd be a hell of a thing if we started a public panic against our own product for nothing. And then . . ."

It took just two weeks, in a soundproofed and guarded laboratory on Benson's Carondelet estate, to convict their delicious drink of responsibility for that Munich State Opera House Horror and everything else. Reports from confidential investigators in Munich confirmed this. It had, of course, been impossible to in-

interview the two thousand men and women who had turned the Opera House into a pyre for their own immolation, but none of the tiny minority who had kept their sanity and saved their lives had tasted Evri-Flave.

It took another month to find out exactly how the stuff affected the human nervous system, and they almost wrecked their own nervous systems in the process. The real villain, they discovered, was the incredible-looking long-chain compound alluded to in the original notes as Ingredient Beta; its principal physiological effect was to greatly increase the sensitivity of the aural nerves. Not only was the hearing range widened—after consuming thirty CC of Beta, they could hear the sound of an ultrasonic dog-whistle quite plainly—but the very quality of all audible sounds was curiously enhanced and altered. Myers, the psychologist, who was also well grounded in neurology, explained how the chemical produced this effect; it meant about as much to Benson as some of his chemistry did to Bill Myers. There was also a secondary, purely psychological, effect. Certain musical chords had definite effects on the emotions of the hearer, and the subject, beside being directly influenced by the music, was rendered extremely open to verbal suggestions accompanied by a suitable musical background.

HUNTER PATROL

Benson transferred the final results of this stage of the research to the black notebook and burned the scratch-sheets.

"That's how it happened, then," he said. "The Munich thing was the result of all that Götterdämmerung music. There was a band at the baseball park in Baltimore. The New Orleans Orgy started while a local radio station was broadcasting some of this new dance-music. Look, these tone-clusters, here, have a definite sex-excitation effect. This series of six chords, which occur in some of the Wagnerian stuff; effect, a combined feeling of godlike isolation and despair. And these consecutive fifths—a sense of danger, anger, combativeness. You know, we could work out a whole range of emotional stimuli to fit the effects of Ingredient Beta . . ."

"We don't want to," Myers said. "We want to work out a substitute for Beta that will keep the flavor of the drink without the psycho-physiological effects."

"Yes, sure. I have some of the boys at the plant lab working on that. Gave them a lot of syrup without Beta, and told them to work out cheap additives to restore the regular Evri-Flave taste; told them it was an effort to find a cheap substitute for an expensive ingredient. But look, Bill. You and I both see, for instance, that a powerful worldwide supra-national sovereignty is the only guarantee of world peace. If we could use something

like this to help overcome antiquated verbal prejudices and nationalistic emotional attachments . . . ”

“No!” Myers said. “I won’t ever consent to anything like that, Fred! Not even in a cause like world peace; use a thing like this for a good, almost holy, cause now, and tomorrow we, or those who would come after us, would be using it to create a tyranny. You know what year this is, Bill?”

“Why, 1984,” Benson said.

“Yes. You remember that old political novel of Orwell’s, written about forty years ago? Well, that’s a picture of the kind of world you’d have, eventually, no matter what kind of a world you started out to make. Fred, don’t ever think of using this stuff for a purpose like that. If you try it, I’ll fight you with every resource I have.”

There was a fanatical, almost murderous, look in Bill Myers’ eyes. Benson put the notebook in his pocket, then laughed and threw up his hands.

“Hey, Joe! Hey, Joe!” he cried. “You’re right, of course, Bill. We can’t even trust the UN with a thing like this. It makes the H-bomb look like a stone hatchet . . . Well, I’ll call Grant, at the plant lab, and see how his boys are coming along with the substitute; as soon as we get it, we can put out a confidential letter to all our distributors and syrup-manufacturers . . . ”

He walked alone in the garden

at Carondelet, watching the color fade out of the sky and the twilight seep in among the clipped yews. All the world could be like this garden, a place of peace and beauty and quiet, if only . . . All the world *would* be a beautiful and peaceful garden, in his own lifetime! He had the means of making it so!

Three weeks later, he murdered his friend and partner, Bill Myers. It was a suicide; nobody but Fred Benson knew that he had taken fifty CC of pure Ingredient Beta in a couple of cocktails while listening to the queer phonograph record that he had played half an hour before blowing his brains out.

The decision had cost Benson a battle with his conscience from which he had emerged the sole survivor. The conscience was buried along with Bill Myers, and all that remained was a purpose.

Evri-Flave stayed on the market unaltered. The night before the national election, the World Sovereignty party distributed thousands of gallons of Evri-Flave; their speakers, on every radio and television network, were backgrounded by soft music. The next day, when the vote was counted, it was found that the American Nationalists had carried a few backwoods precincts in the Rockies and the Southern Appalachians and one county in Alaska, where there had been no distribution of Evri-Flave.

The dreams came back more

often, now that Bill Myers was gone. Benson was only beginning to realize what a large fact in his life the companionship of the young psychologist had been. Well, a world of peace and beauty was an omelet worth the breaking of many eggs . . .

He purchased another great tract of land near the city, and donated it to the UN for their new headquarters buildings; the same architects and landscapists who had created the estate at Carondelet were put to work on it. In the middle of what was to become World City, they erected a small home for Fred Benson. Benson was often invited to address the delegates to the UN; always, there was soft piped-in music behind his words. He saw to it that Evri-Flave was available free to all UN personnel. The Senate of the United States elected him as perpetual U. S. delegate-in-chief to the UN; not long after, the Security Council elected him their perpetual chairman.

In keeping with his new dignities, and to ameliorate his youthful appearance, he grew a mustache and, eventually, a small beard. The black notebook in which he kept the records of his experiments was always with him; page after page was filled with notes. Experiments in sonics, like the one which had produced the ultrasonic stun-gun which rendered lethal weapons unnecessary for police and defense purposes, or the new musical combinations with which he

was able to play upon every emotion and instinct.

But he still dreamed, the same recurring dream of the young soldier and the old man in the office. By now, he was consistently identifying himself with the latter. He took to carrying one of the thick-barrelled stun-pistols always, now. Alone, he practiced constantly with it, drawing, breaking soap-bubbles with the concentrated sound-waves it projected. It was silly, perhaps, but it helped him in his dreams. Now, the old man with whom he identified himself would draw a stun-pistol, occasionally, to defend himself.

The years drained one by one through the hour-glass of Time. Year after year, the world grew more peaceful, more beautiful. There were no more incidents like the mass-suicide of Munich or the mass-perversions of New Orleans; the playing and even the composing of music was strictly controlled—no dangerous notes or chords could be played in a world drenched with Ingredient Beta. Steadily the idea grew that peace and beauty were supremely good, that violence and ugliness were supremely evil. Even competitive sports which simulated violence; even children born ugly and misshapen . . .

He finished the breakfast which he had prepared for himself—he trusted no food that another had touched—and knotted the vivid blue scarf about his

neck before slipping into the loose coat of glossy plum-brown, then checked the stun-pistol and pocketed the black notebook, its plastileather cover glossy from long use. He stood in front of the mirror, brushing his beard, now snow-white. Two years, now, and he would be eighty—had he been anyone but The Guide, he would have long ago retired to the absolute peace and repose of one of the Elders' Havens. Peace and repose, however, were not for The Guide; it would take another twenty years to finish his task of remaking the world, and he would need every day of it that his medical staff could borrow or steal for him. He made an eye-baffling practice draw with the stun-pistol, then holstered it and started down the spiral stairway to the office below.

There was the usual mass of papers on his desk. A corps of secretaries had screened out everything but what required his own personal and immediate attention, but the business of guiding a world could only be reduced to a certain point. On top was the digest of the world's news for the past twenty-four hours, and below that was the agenda for the afternoon's meeting of the Council. He laid both in front of him, reading over the former and occasionally making a note on the latter. Once his glance strayed to the cardboard box in front of him, with the envelope taped to it—the latest improvement on the Evri-Flave

syrup, with the report from his own chemists, all conditioned to obedience, loyalty and secrecy. If they thought he was going to try that damned stuff on himself . . .

There was a sudden gleam of light in the middle of the room, in front of his desk. No, a mist, through which a blue light seemed to shine. The stun-pistol was in his hand—his instinctive reaction to anything unusual—and pointed into the shining mist when it vanished and a man appeared in front of him; a man in the baggy green combat-uniform that he himself had worn fifty years before; a man with a heavy automatic pistol in his hand. The gun was pointed directly at him.

The Guide aimed quickly and pressed the trigger of the ultrasonic stunner. The pistol dropped soundlessly on the thick-piled rug; the man in uniform slumped in an inert heap. The Guide sprang to his feet and rounded the desk, crossing to and bending over the intruder. Why, this was the dream that had plagued him through the years. But it was ending differently. The young man—his face was startlingly familiar, somehow—was not killing the old man. Those years of practice with the stun-pistol . . .

He stooped and picked the automatic up. The young man was unconscious, and The Guide had his pistol, now. He slipped the automatic into his pocket and

straightened beside his inert would-be slayer.

A shimmering globe of blue mist appeared around them, brightened to a dazzle, and dimmed again to a colored mist before it vanished, and when it cleared away, he was standing beside the man in uniform, in the sandy bed of a dry stream at the mouth of a little ravine, and directly in front of him, looming above him, was a thing that had not been seen in the world for close to half a century—a big, hot-smelling tank with a red star on its turret.

He might have screamed—the din of its treads and engines deafened him—and, in panic, he turned and ran, his old legs racing, his old heart pumping madly. The noise of the tank increased as machine guns joined the uproar. He felt the first bullet strike him, just above the hips—no pain; just a tremendous impact. He might have felt the second bullet, too, as the ground tilted and rushed up at his face. Then he was diving into a tunnel of blackness that had no end . . .

Captain Fred Benson, of Benson's Butchers, had been jerked back into consciousness when the field began to build around him. He was struggling to rise, fumbling the grenade out of his pocket, when it collapsed. Sure enough, right in front of him, so close that he could smell the very heat of it, was the big tank with the red star on its turret.

He cursed the sextet of sanctimonious double-crossers eight thousand miles and fifty years away in space-time. The machine guns had stopped—probably because they couldn't be depressed far enough to aim at him, now; that was a notorious fault of some of the newer Pan-Soviet tanks. He had the bomb out of his pocket, when the machine guns began firing again, this time at something on his left. Wondering what had created the diversion, he rocked back on his heels, pressed the button, and heaved, closing his eyes. As the thing left his fingers, he knew that he had thrown too hard. His muscles, accustomed to the heavier cast-iron grenades, had betrayed him. For a moment, he was closer to despair than at any other time in the whole phantasmagoric adventure. Then he was hit, with physical force, by a wave of almost solid heat. It didn't smell like the heat of the tank's engines; it smelled like molten metal, with undertones of burned flesh. Immediately, there was a multiple explosion that threw him flat, as the tank's ammunition went up. There were no screams. It was too fast for that. He opened his eyes.

The turret and top armor of the tank had vanished. The two massive treads had been toppled over, one to either side. The body had collapsed between them, and it was running sticky trickles of molten metal. He blinked, rubbed his eyes on the back of his hand, and looked

again. Of all the many blasted and burned-out tanks, Soviet and UN, that he had seen, this was the most completely wrecked thing in his experience. And he'd done that with one grenade . . .

Remembering the curious manner in which, at the last, the tank had begun firing at something to the side, he looked around; to see the crumpled body in the pale violet-gray trousers and the plum-brown coat. Finding his carbine and reloading it, he went over to the dead man, turning the body over. He was an old man, with a white mustache and a small white beard—why, if the mustache were smaller and there were no beard, he would pass for Benson's own father, who had died in 1962. The clothes weren't Turkish or Armenian or Persian, or anything one would expect in this country.

The old man had a pistol in his coat pocket, and Benson pulled it out and looked at it, then did a double-take and grabbed for his own holster, to find it empty. The pistol was his own 9.5 Colt automatic. He looked at the dead man, with the white beard and the vivid blue neckscarf, and he was sure that he had never seen him before. He'd had that pistol when he'd come down the ravine . . .

There was another pistol under the dead man's coat, in a shoulder-holster; a queer thing with a thick round barrel, like an old percussion pepper-box, and a diaphragm instead of a

muzzle. Probably projected ultrasonic waves. He holstered his own Colt and pocketed the unknown weapon. There was a black plastleather-bound notebook, It was full of notes. Chemical formulae, yes, and some stuff on sonics; that tied in with the queer pistol. He pocketed that. He'd look both over, when he had time and privacy, two scarce commodities in the Army . . .

At that moment, there was a sudden rushing overhead, and an instant later, the barrage began falling beyond the crest of the ridge. He looked at his watch, blinked, and looked again. That barrage was due at 0550; according to his watch, it was 0726. That was another mystery, to go with the question of who the dead man was, where he had come from, and how he'd gotten hold of Benson's pistol. Yes, and how that tank had gotten blown up. Benson was sure he had used his last grenade back at the supply-dump.

The hell with it; he'd worry about all that later. The attack was due any minute, now, and there would be fleeing Commies coming up the valley ahead of the UN advance. He'd better get himself placed before they started coming in on him.

He stopped thinking about the multiple mystery, a solution to which seemed to dance maddeningly just out of his mental reach, and found himself a place among the rocks to wait, and while he waited, he looked over

the plastileather-bound notebook. In civil life, he had been a high school chemistry teacher, but the stuff in this book was utterly new to him. Some of it he could understand readily enough; the rest of it he could dig out for himself. Stuff about some kind of a carbonated soft-

drink, and about a couple of unbelievable-looking long-chain molecules . . .

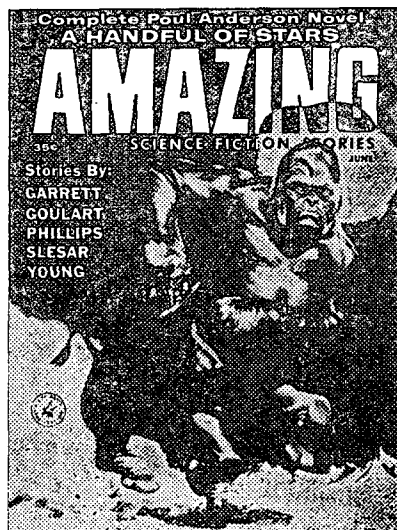
After a while, fugitive Communists began coming up the valley to make their stand.

Benson put away the notebook, picked up his carbine, and cuddled the stock to his cheek . . .

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

A feast of fine stories by top-notch, top-name writers will be yours to savor in the upcoming June AMAZING.



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MARTIAN V. F. W.

By G. I. VANDENBURG

*There's nothing like a parade, I always
say. Of course, I'm a Martian.*

MR. CRUTHERS was a busy man. Coordinating the biggest parade in New York's history is not easy. He was maneuvering his two hundred pounds around Washington Square with the agility of a quarterback. He had his hands full organizing marchers, locating floats, placing the many brass bands in their proper order and barking commands to assistants. But Mr. Cruthers approached the job with all the zeal of an evangelist at a revival meeting.

As he approached the southwest corner of the square he saw something that jarred his already frayed nerves. He stopped abruptly. The mass of clipboards and papers he was carrying fell to the street. There before him were one hundred and fifty ants, each of them at least six feet tall. His first impulse was to

turn and run for the nearest doctor. He was certain that the strain of his job was proving too much for him. But one of the ants approached him. It seemed friendly enough, so Mr. Cruthers stood his ground.

"My group is waiting for their assignment." The ant's voice seemed to be coming from the very core of its thorax which was a violent red.

"Good Lord!" Mr. Cruthers' mouth opened up as wide as an oven door.

"Mr. Cruthers, I believe the parade is about to start and my group—"

Mr. Cruthers managed to blurt out. "What the devil *are* you anyway!"

"This is the parade marking the International Geophysical Year, is it not?" The ant had a pleasant, friendly voice.

"Well, yes, but—"

"And you are Mr. Cruthers, the manager of the parade, is that not correct?"

Mr. Cruthers rubbed his eyes and took another look at the strange creature. Its head was a brilliant yellow. It had two large goggle eyes which rolled like itinerant marbles when it spoke. The low slung abdomen was a burnt brown. It was bad enough, Cruthers thought, that these ants were six feet tall, but it was nightmarish to see them in three colors.

"Mr. Cruthers," the ant continued, "haven't you been instructed by the National Academy of Sciences that the Martian V.F.W. is to participate in this parade?"

"The Martian—!!" Mr. Cruthers' mouth was open again. Then he realized that when the ant spoke its mouth didn't move. He picked up his clipboard and papers from the street. His voice was hostile now. "What the hell is this, some kind of a gag! What are you trying to do, scare a man half to death!"

"Oh, we're not joking, Mr. Cruthers. The National Academy—"

"They didn't say anything to me about a bunch of clowns dressed up like ants!" Mr. Cruthers' indignation became intensified. He was loathe to admit that he'd been taken in by such obviously animated costumes. "Now look here, I'm a very busy man."

"The arrangements *have* been made, Mr. Cruthers. If my group is refused a place in this parade we shall file suit immediately. As manager you'll be named co-defendant." The ant was gentle but firm.

The thought of being sued softened Mr. Cruthers' attitude. "Well, I'm very sorry, pal, but every contingent in this parade is listed on my clipboard and you're not. I know this list by heart. What did you say the name of your group was?"

"The Martian V.F.W."

Mr. Cruthers' was amused. "Those sure are the craziest outfits I've ever seen," he chuckled. "Where'd you get them? Walt Disney make them for you?" He followed his own little joke with a long throaty laugh.

The ant was impatient. "About the parade, Mr. Cruthers, there isn't much time."

"Oh, yes, the parade. Well, let me see," he thumbed through the clipboard, "I guess there's always room for a few laughs. How many in your group?"

"One hundred and fifty. And we also have a float with us. Not a very large one. It measures twenty by twenty."

"Tell you what. You move your group to the corner of Thompson Street and Third Street. Get behind the Tiffany float and follow them, okay?"

The ant paused a moment to record the instructions in his mind. Then he turned to leave.

"Oh, wait a minute," Mr. Cruthers cried before the ant could

rejoin his group. "Just who did you speak to at the National Academy of Sciences?"

"I believe it was a Mr. Canfield."

Mr. Cruthers' face lit up. "Well, why didn't you say so in the first place! I'd have placed you right away."

"That's perfectly all right, Mr. Cruthers."

"Listen, I don't know what you guys do but those costumes should certainly bring the house down. There's going to be four million people watching this parade. I bet that's the biggest audience you've ever seen."

"It certainly is." With that the ant strode away.

"Good luck!" Mr. Cruthers shouted after him.

"Daddy! Daddy, look! Look at the big rocket!" The little boy jumped up and down gleefully. "It must be a whole mile long, Daddy! What kind is it?"

"That's the Vanguard, son."

An autumn breeze from the East River chilled their vantage point at Sixty-First Street and Fifth Avenue.

"The Vanguard?" The name meant nothing to the boy. "Gee, I'll bet it can fly all the way to the stars!"

"It's the rocket that carried the first artificial satellite into space."

The parade, now three hours old, continued past the reviewing stand.

"I wanna get a better look at the Vanguard!" the boy shouted.

The father lifted the boy onto his shoulders. The little fellow laughed and whooped it up, firing several shots from his Captain Video Ray gun at the passing missile.

The rocket moved on and the noise of the crowd diminished slightly.

A one-hundred piece brass band was passing in front of them. They were playing "The Stars and Stripes Forever." They were followed by the Sak's Fifth Avenue display; nine small floats, each depicting life on another planet. The National Academy of Sciences had a success on its hands.

"Wow! Daddy, I wanna ride on it! I wanna ride on that float and visit all those planets! Can I, Daddy!" The boy became all limbs trying to squirm down from his father's shoulders.

"You stay right where you are, young man," the father struggled to hold his balance.

"But I wanna go to the stars. I can watch the rest of the parade from Venus or Mercury! Please, Daddy!"

The father grinned. "Not just yet, son, but it won't be long before man will go to the stars."

"Who lives up there, Daddy?"

"Oh, there isn't any life up there yet."

"If no one's living up there why does anyone want to go there?"

"Well, maybe there'll be too many people on earth someday and then we'll have to find other planets with more room."

Another monstrous brass band was going by. The boy became restless. He began to toy with his ray gun, half interested in seeing if there were any sparks left in it. "Why can't there be something besides so many bands in a parade? I wanna see another float."

The father tried to interest the boy by pointing out all the famous people who were also there: a variety of statesmen the world's leading scientists and religious and cultural leaders, the president of the United States.

The boy was interested but not in what his elder was saying to him. He was looking downtown, his eyes squinting, trying to make out figures as far away as Fifty-sixth Street. Then his mouth opened, not uttering a sound yet, just waiting to burst with joy at what was coming toward them.

His father looked up at him. "I wish you'd tell me what you are looking at. I'm all the way down here on street level, remember?"

"Daddy, they look like ants!"

"What?"

"Ants, Daddy, ants! A whole army of them. Ain't it exciting?"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"They're doing somersaults and back flips and everything! They're coming right this way! Gee, there's hundreds of them. And they got a float behind

them, Daddy! A great big float with something burning on it."

The child sitting on his shoulders made mobility impossible for the father. And he couldn't see around the spectators. He resigned himself to stand and wait for this new spectacle to overtake them. The reaction to this new sight had already begun to work its way uptown. In the distance, but getting closer every second, he could hear unrestrained laughter and rejoicing.

"Hey, take it easy!" The boy was beginning to ride the shoulders like a bronco buster. "By the time they get here I won't have any shoulders left. Where are they now?"

"They're almost here, Daddy! And they aren't ants at all. They're just a bunch of clowns dressed up like it." He began to giggle hysterically. "Golly, they're funny. Can you see them yet, Daddy?"

Before the father could produce an answer the ants were in view. They were a sight that couldn't fail to stimulate the funny bone. By comparison with real ants everything about them had been grossly exaggerated to achieve the proper effect. They walked on their two back legs but the four front apertures were far from idle. Some of them turned somersaults, others did complicated flips consisting of two or three spins in mid-air. Still others, doing a kind of animated cakewalk, carried toy ray guns which they fired at random

into the crowd. The guns were something like the little boy's Captain Video ray gun, only larger. They emitted little streaks of blue sparks which shone brightly but disappeared when contact was made with air.

They were easily the hit of the parade, a three ring circus all by themselves, as they pranced and clowned their way up Fifth Avenue giving the spectators a whale of a show that was completely new.

The guests on the reviewing stand refrained from any hilarity until they saw the float that four of the ants were pulling behind them. It was in keeping with the rest of the nonsense they were perpetrating. The float boasted eight larger ray guns, three on either side and two in the rear, that fired the same fascinating blue sparks. Behind each gun an ant stood on its head, wildly waving six legs in the breeze, begging to be noticed and laughed at. Above the guns, emblazoned in fiery orange letters, were the words: "MARTIAN V.F.W." This was interpreted by one and all as a punch line and was treated accordingly.

It was heartwarming to be able to see the president and so many other dignitaries abandon composure in favor of a good old fashioned belly laugh.

"Daddy, I can't laugh any more," the boy had to pause between every other word. "My stomach hurts. Aren't they the funniest things you ever saw?"

The father was too convulsed to be able to answer him.

"Daddy, one of them is coming this way! He's firing his Captain Video ray gun at us!" They boy squeezed his father and held on tight.

The father took a deep breath in order to be able to speak. "Take your gun and fire back at him, son. Fire away! Go on, he's just being playful!" He broke forth with another gust of laughter. "I won't see anything as funny as this again if I live to be a hundred!"

The ant pranced over to where they were standing, firing its gun in every direction. The boy fired back. The ant took one look at the lad's gun and let out a long cackling sound which built to a crescendo and then stopped as though it had been turned off. The ant rejoined the group and they continued on their merry way.

The boy fired several shots into the float as it passed. He wanted to see if he could knock out those blazing orange letters: MARTIAN V.F.W. The letters continued to burn, but in the boy's mind he was certain he had made several direct hits.

The boy and his father watched the float until it was out of sight. They knew there wouldn't be another attraction like those ants. They must have been real professionals, the father thought. Such teamwork! Such precision! Each one of them having a specific job to do and

each doing it to perfection. After them everything was bound to be anticlimactic.

More marchers, more bands, a few more floats. The boy was beginning to tire. It had been a long day. Now everything was dull. "Daddy, I don't want to see any more. Let's go home."

"We'll stay another five minutes."

The parade somehow seemed to be slowing down. The father yawned and let his son down from his shoulders. He looked across the street at the president and the other dignitaries on the reviewing stand. All were slowly raising their hands in salute as another color guard drowsily made its way by.

Soon the last group in the parade was passing the reviewing stand. Another brass band. They were moving with the speed of a glacier. A full five seconds elapsed between each note of music. Everything was happening in slow motion. On the reviewing stand the dignified hands went up, agonizingly slow, to a final salute and they stayed there. The greatest minds in the world stood motionless, unalterably still. Just as each wave of pandemonium had unfurled itself up Fifth Avenue during the parade, so now did silence take command.

The little boy tugged at his father's coat. "Daddy! Daddy," he pleaded, "why has the parade stopped? I wan-na-go-home—" His words came more slowly with each passing second, like a high speed phonograph playing at thirty-three and a third r.p.m. "Dad-dy — why — don't — you — an — swer — me — Da — ddy — why — don't —" His father never heard him.

Fifty miles above the Atlantic the fleet of spaceships hung suspended like lanterns. In the lead ship the ant in charge of communications reported to the commander.

"We've just received the first communique from the advance guard, sir."

"Read it to me."

The communications chief read from a large perforated paper. "Time—0600—mission accomplished. Manhattan island cut down the middle—immediate result of super-sonic rays; four million dead—rays spreading east and west—estimated time of rays' full effect; 0800— island will then be neutralized—awaiting further orders." The ant folded the paper and looked up at the commander. "Shall I relay further orders, sir?"

"No." The commander of the ants paused and stroked his chin. "We're moving in."

THE END



WET PAINT

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

*You're liable to find anything—or anybody
—out on the gloomy, lonely Rim Worlds.
But when the Survey Group on uninhabited
Kinsolving found a cave painting with the
paint still wet . . . well . . .*

IN ALL probability you've never heard of Kinsolving—most people, and that includes the majority of spacemen, have not. It's one of the Rim Worlds, which means that it's well off the beaten track even for the Commission's Epsilon Class tramps. It's an Earth-type planet, but not sufficiently similar to Earth to make it attractive to colonists. The gravity is a little too heavy and the air is a little too thin and a little too rich in carbon dioxide. Its sun is hot enough, but not very bright, and its light is so blue as to convey the impression of chilliness. Then, of course, there is that aching emptiness of the night sky for six months of the year without even a moon to take the curse off it.

Kinsolving, then, is just a name in the Survey Commission's files—just a name and a

few lines of relevant data. Discovered and charted by Commodore Pearson of the Survey Ship *Magellan*, named after his second-in-command. Survey team left on planet, taken off after the usual two years of exploration and research. Colony established, complete with machinery and necessary flora and fauna. After ten years colony removed, at its own request, and transferred to Clarency, q.v.

"What do you know about Kinsolving?" Warburton asked me.

Warburton is my immediate superior and is the Director of the Survey Commission's little publicized Department of Investigation. Boiled down to essentials his job is to read reports—reports written by captains of Survey ships, by masters of the Interstellar Transport Commission's vessels and, now and

again, by the masters of ships owned by those few alien races that meet us on equal terms on a technological level. Sometimes he finds something of interest in these reports—and when he does he sends an investigatory team which, in its turn, makes out its own report. What happens next is up to the high brass.

“What do you know about Kinsolving?” he asked again.

“Rear Admiral, Retired,” I said. “Useful but undistinguished career. That’s all.”

“Not the man,” snapped Warburton. “The planet. He had a world named after him. Look it up, Tarrant.”

I looked it up. I dialed the Central Library, said what I wanted, and in a matter of seconds Warburton and I were watching the pitifully few paragraphs of printed matter glowing on the screen.

“A typical Rim World,” I said. “Rather worse than most, perhaps.”

“I have a report here,” said Warburton, “from one Captain Spence, Master of *Epsilon Eridani*. She was on charter for a while to Thule Lines. She was en route from Elsinore to Ultimo when she had trouble with her Drive—and, as you know, the Mannschenn Drive controls can be recalibrated only on a planetary surface. The nearest planet was Kinsolving and Spence landed there, at the old spaceport. Anyhow, you can read.” He handed me the sheaf of papers. “See what you make of it.”

I sat down and read the report. Reports made by shipmasters, I have found, fall invariably into either one or the other of two categories. They are either tersely official or too, too literary. It was soon obvious to me that Captain Spence fancied himself as a latter-day Conrad.

“The derelict spaceport buildings looked, in that livid light, like tombstones in a deserted graveyard,” he wrote. “A little to the south lay the town, obviously dead. It was hard to believe that it had ever been inhabited. The only visible movement was that of the smoke and steam drifting in ragged streamers up past our Control Room ports—the apron, as we had noticed from the air prior to our landing, was overgrown with some tough, indigenous creeping plant, the tendrils of which had been incinerated by the backblast of our Interplanetary Drive.

“I looked at Makins, my Chief Officer. Something of my feelings must have shown in my expression. He looked at me and said, ‘Fine place for a funeral, Captain.’”

So it went on. I skipped a few pages of rich, beautiful atmospheric writing. Then:

“Laurencon, the Interstellar Drive Engineer, told me that the work of recalibration would take at least six days, local time. On hearing this Mr. Makins asked my permission to break out the helicopter and, accompanied by a

party of junior officers and cadets, to carry out an exploration of his own. He assured me that no dangerous animals existed on Kinsolving, and a copy of Commodore Pearson's report, which had been put aboard, together with other useful literature by the management of Thule Lines, bore him out. He said that it was probable that some of the pigs and rabbits brought by the colonists had survived and pointed out that the meat in our tissue culture vats had become rather flavorless. He said that he wished to find some of the caves reported by the original survey team and to take photographs of the paintings on their walls. He even thought that his own unskilled investigations might do something towards solving the mystery of the disappearance of the long-ago humanoids who had produced those paintings. I was reluctant at first to give my permission, then remembered that it is the duty of every shipmaster to further the work of interstellar survey when by so doing he does not endanger either his own ship or her personnel. I told him to go ahead with his preparations.

"Mr. Makins is an efficient officer, and by early afternoon of that same day he had everything ready. The helicopter was assembled and standing on the apron, looking like some huge, ungainly insect. Its storage space was packed with provisions and ammunition for the light sporting rifles that all of us carried; on

the Rim Worlds there is little in the way of amusement and hunting is one way of spending one's shore leave. He had chosen to accompany him Wallis, the Third Officer, and Penrod and Gilbey, two of the cadets.

"He told me that he planned to take the helicopter to the foothills of the McIvor Range, in the valleys of which the caves with the paintings had been found. He said that he would keep in touch with the ship by means of the helicopter's radio telephone and that he had already drawn up a schedule of times with Mr. Cade, the Radio Officer. I made sure that he and his party had everything that they were likely to need—there were, however, very few suggestions that I could make—then stood back and watched as the little flowers of flame blossomed at the tips of the rotor blades, as the ungainly contraption lifted and in its graceless way flew to the westward, to the dull blue serrated line of the Range in silhouette against the dull blue sky, the bright metal of it gleaming drearily in the light of that dreary blue sun."

"And they called it the birth of the blues," I muttered.

"What was that?" demanded Warburton. He grinned. "Yes, Captain Spence's prose is rather overpowering at times. But read on."

I read on.

"That night Makins called the ship at the appointed time. He

had little to report. He had shot a pig, and he and his party were supping off roast pork. He had found the entrances to several promising looking caves but, so far, had deferred investigation. I rather gained the impression that the real purpose of his expedition had been to get away from the deadly monotony of ship's food.

"He called again the following morning. He said that he was about to commence his exploration of the caves. I told him to make sure that he used the balls of twine that he had taken to mark his inward track; he replied rather curtly that as he had thought of those balls of twine he was not likely to forget their purpose. At noon young Penrod called the ship, telling me that the others were still in the caves and that he had been left at the camp to cook the mid-day meal. They were having rabbit, he said, and sweet corn, a goodly supply of which was growing wild near where the helicopter had landed.

"The next call was scheduled for late afternoon. I was in the Radio Room waiting for it to come through, but I was expecting little more, by this time, than a detailed account of the day's meals. Makins' voice, however, was excited.

"'Captain,' he said, 'we've found the paintings!'

"'Good,' I replied. 'Did you get photographs?'

"He ignored my question.

"'Captain!' he almost shouted, 'the paint is wet!'

"'Mr. Makins,' I said, 'a Survey Team spent all of two years on this planet. Had there been intelligent life here they must surely have found it. Perhaps your wet paint is due to seepage of moisture from the cave roof.'

"He replied with a rude monosyllable. Then, 'Sir,' he said stiffly, 'I'm Mate of a ship. I know something about paint and painting. It's part of my job. If I say that the paint is wet, it *is* wet. I am returning to the spaceport at once, and I suggest that you come with me in the helicopter to see for yourself.'

"I was waiting outside when the helicopter returned. The sun was down, but we saw its navigation lights and the red exhaust flames when it was still a few miles distant; they stood out sharply and brightly against the black, almost starless sky. All of us, except the engineers who were working on the recalibration of the Drive controls, were waiting outside. News spreads very fast through a ship.

"The helicopter landed. We stood back until the vanes had almost stopped whirring, then almost ran to the door of the cabin. Makins was the first out. He stood there mutely and showed me his hands. The palms of them were smeared with black and ochre. There was a strong smell of vegetable oil and other, unidentifiable smells that must have come from the pigments used. I touched Makins' right

palm with the index finger of my own right hand. The tip of my finger was stained black.

"'Mr. Makins,' I asked, 'is this a hoax?'

"'I am not a first-trip cadet,' he replied. 'I have learned that a sense of humor does little to aid one's promotion.'

"He was rather annoyed when I told him that Mr. Wallis would pilot me back to the cave and that he would have to remain with the ship. Regulations make it quite clear that on planets with no proper port facilities—and surely Kinsolving comes into that category!—either the Mate or the Master must be aboard at all times. He told me that he had left a good fire burning in the valley and that Mr. Wallis would have no trouble in finding the landing place. So it proved to be.

"It was cold in the valley—in spite of the fire—and dark. The little river running down it chuckled and gurgled over the stones of its bed, sounding uncomfortably like voices. Something was rustling in the bushes. A pig, perhaps, or a rabbit, or one of the large, harmless herbivorous mammals native to the planet, or one of the predatory lizards. According to the Survey Team and according to the colonists these lizards never attacked Man, but there has to be a first time for everything.

"At its upper end the valley was more of a canyon, and that is where the caves were. Wallis took a torch from the cabin of the helicopter and guided me

over the rough ground. The two cadets tailed along behind.

"We found the mouth of the cave without any difficulty. The end of the ball of twine shone white in the light of our torches; it was made fast to a bush. The cave itself was all of seven feet from floor to ceiling and must once have had a stream flowing through it; there was a fair thickness of fine white sand on its floor. For about fifty feet we walked, descending gradually. Then, after a sharp turn, we came into the first chamber. On all the walls were the paintings. I have seen photographs of similar work by primitive artists on Earth and other humanoid-inhabited worlds. They all run very much to pattern. They all, or almost all, depict hunting scenes. There are the hunters with their spears or bows, sometimes their dogs. There is the mammoth or the buffalo, or its other-wordly equivalent, resembling an animated pin-cushion. There is the peculiar blend of crudity and sophistication that is inevitable when the artist has yet to learn his craft.

"It was all very impressive. I walked to the nearer of the paintings, put out an experimental finger.

"'Mr. Wallis,' I said, 'it is obvious, even to me, that these paintings were made at least thousands of years ago.'

"'These, sir,' he said, 'are not the paintings.'

"He led us along what seemed

at least another two miles of tunnel. We came at last into another chamber, larger than the first. Its walls, too, were covered with paintings. The hunting theme was again predominant.

"And the paint was wet."

I looked up from the report.

"That initial Survey Team must have made a very poor job," I said.

"Initial Survey Teams just don't make very poor jobs," said Warburton, "ever. If the Initial Survey Team said that there was no intelligent life on the planet—then there *was* no intelligent life on the planet. When you finish reading Captain Spence's report you will find that the wet paint was the only evidence of intelligent life found by the crew of *Epsilon Eridani*. She couldn't stay after the recalibration of her Drive controls was completed—Captain Spence was bound by the terms of the time charter—but her people used every remaining second of the period of their stay on Kinsolving to try to find the answer to the riddle. Spence took scrapings of paint both from the old and the new paintings. They have been analyzed. The old paint is *old*—at least fifty thousand years. The new paint was mixed only a few months ago. The oil was not, as he assumed, of vegetable origin, but animal. The pigments were powdered charcoal and an ochreous earth."

"So," I asked, "what?"

"So we are sending our own

team of investigators," he told me. "This is all part and parcel of the . . . the general queerness that you find out at the Rim. The Rim governments aren't interested—they never are unless there's money involved. So it's our baby."

"Who are you sending?" I asked.

"The Rhine Institute will supply an Esper if I ask them nicely. Then there's Rizzio, our own tame gunman. An ethnologist might not come amiss. There seems to be scope for a speleologist. Then, of course, we must have the usual man in the street who has knocked around a bit and who is not entirely devoid of imagination as coordinator. That's where you come in."

"That's what I feared," I said.

"You don't like the Rim, do you?" he asked.

"Who does? There's that feeling that all the time that you're on the very edge of *something*—or *nothing*. I'm never sure which of the two is worse."

"You'd better start getting packed and saying your good-byes," he said. "If you catch *Alpha Draconis* next week you'll get out to Thule in under three months. If you miss her it means a roundabout route, mainly in Delta and Epsilon Class tramps and, possibly, an occasional Shaara ship. As it is, the *Alfie Dragon* can't take you all the way. Her terminal planet's Mer-genwiler."

So I made a start by handing things over to my immediate in-

ferior, a youth called Jones. I wondered how the office would manage without me. There were only four of us in the Department in those days—Warburton, Rizzio, Jones and myself.

The next day Warburton was in a bad temper. He had succeeded in persuading the Rhine Institute to lend us an Esper free of charge—after all, the Institute is usually only too grateful to be allowed to poke its collective nose into anything smacking of paranormal phenomena. The grounded Comodore who was his superior had refused, however, to sanction the expense of hiring any of the experts that he had considered necessary for the job. The team, then, was to consist of Rizzio, the Esper and myself.

Rizzio, who had been called into his office for instructions, wasn't worried about it. He believed—and not without cause—that there was no possible jam in the Universe out of which he could not shoot his way. His favorite weapons were a pair of beautifully balanced, beautifully inlaid point five automatics, although in his hands a little Minetti needle gun was equally deadly. But Rizzio liked the feel of the heavier weapons, liked the kick of them, the roar of them. For the various radiation pistols he had nothing but contempt. "These," he would say, pulling his big automatics with a lightning movement, "will always knock a man down no matter what sort of armor he's wearing

or what sort of screen he's using. Those other toys will only give him a mild case of sunburn."

That, then, was Rizzio, a little man with all of the little man's aggressiveness, a little man elevated to giant's stature by virtue of the weapons that he handled with such assured mastery. I liked him, but I was a little afraid of him. I was always conscious of the viciousness that I had seen, more than once, transform the dark, normally pleasantly smiling face into a snarling, feral mask.

We sat there — Warburton, Rizzio, Jones and myself—drinking coffee from the automatic dispenser and smoking. We advanced various theories to account for the still-wet cave painting—Jones, I remember, insisted on calling Central Library for information about some hoax in the Twentieth Century involving some allegedly prehistoric but actually non-existent being called Piltdown Man. The cave paintings, he said, could well be a similar hoax.

There was a tap at the door.

"Come in!" called Warburton.

The girl who entered looked out of place in our dingy office. She was a little taller than the average and slim with the deceptive slenderness of the professional model. Her sleek hair was burnished copper and her eyes were green rather than gray. Her face was thin and finely modelled, with a wide, generous mouth. She was dressed with the extreme simplicity that looks far

more expensive than deliberate, would-be impressive sumptuousness.

"Commander Warburton?" she asked.

Warburton got to his feet, as we all did.

"Yes. I am Warburton. What can I do for you, Miss . . . ?"

"Wells. Sarah Wells. The Rhine Institute sent me."

So this, I thought, is the Esper. My experience of women with psionic gifts has been that they run to fat, with puddingy faces and poor complexions. This Sarah Wells must be the exception that proved the rule.

"Coffee, Miss Wells?" Jones was falling over himself like a puppy eager to please. "Cigarette?"

"Thank you."

She took a cigarette from Jones' case with the slender fingers of her right hand, put it to her lips. She ignored Jones' lighter. The end of the little cylinder glowed suddenly into incandescence.

Warburton refused to be impressed.

"What other qualifications have you?" he asked. "No doubt you've heard what the job is. It calls for something else than the ability to light a fire without matches."

"They class me as a G.P.," replied the girl, "General Purpose. I could get a job as a Psionic Communications Officer, I suppose. I have limited precognition. Telekinesis to a certain extent, although without sufficient con-

trol to make me an adept. Telemetering . . ."

"You'll do," said Warburton. "You'll do. We don't know what we're looking for, so an all-arounder like yourself is better than a specialist."

"You flatter me," she said, "but I hope to be of service."

We saw little of each other in the short time that remained to us before the departure of *Alpha Draconis*. Each of us had his own private affairs to put in order, his own farewells to make. Each day we would report to Warburton by videophone to see if there were any fresh developments, but there were none. Rizzio, I know, spent most of his spare time on the pistol range trying to improve upon the near perfection that was already his.

And then, one chilly morning, I was at the airport to catch the rocket mail for Port Woomera. I met Rizzio in the waiting room. He was as cocky as ever and full of the praises of the new hundred shot Minetti that he had bought. We saw the girl come in, escorted by a half-dozen scholarly looking men. Warburton came in, his bald head gleaming in the lamplight. He saw us, hurried across to us. He took us to where the girl was standing with the people from the Institute. There were hasty introductions, and then the impersonal voice of the announcer was telling all passengers to board Flight 306 for Port Woomera and we were walking out to the stratosphere

rocket, leaving Warburton and Sarah Wells' colleagues at the door of the waiting room. In silence we climbed the ramp into the long fuselage, in silence we allowed the stewardess to lead us to our seats. None of us was feeling in a conversational mood. I was placed next to the girl, Rizzio sat across the aisle. We survived, as one usually does, the initial, brutal acceleration. We looked out of the ports at the wide expanse of cloud and at the almost black sky above it. We revived slightly when coffee was served, and talked in a desultory manner of unimportant things. I learned that Sarah had never left Earth, had never, even, been as far afield as the Moon. She was a little scared of this adventure that would take us out to the very edge of the Galaxy.

Rizzio broke into the conversation.

"There is nothing to worry about," he said. "I have my guns with me, and they shoot as well at the Rim as on Earth."

"But you are worried," she said, with disconcerting directness. "Both of you. You're scared of the Rim. From your minds I get the impression of the edge of darkness, and the fear that you will fall over that edge."

"Nobody's done it yet," I said.

"There has to be a first time," said Rizzio cheerfully.

Then we were sliding down into denser atmosphere and Woomera was below us—the yellow desert, the white buildings and the silver starships. In sec-

onds the silver ships became more than toys, became great, sky-piercing steeples towering high above our plane as she touched down. From a retractable gaff high on one of the metallic towers fluttered a square of blue and white bunting—the Blue Peter. In gleaming gold and green and crimson on her sleek side sprawled the winged dragon. The cargo ports, I noticed, were closed, and only a trickle of stores and baggage was running up into the vast hull along the one conveyor belt still in operation.

This, then, was *Alpha Draconis*. This was the ship that would take us two-thirds of the way to Thule.

We disembarked at Port Caterick on Mergenwiler, waiting there a week for *Delta Gemini*. Rizzio went out into the forest every day—Mergenwiler is a jungly world—with his precious guns, getting in what he considered valuable practice on the local fauna, especially the *kreeks*, six-legged lizard things well known for their speed and agility. As they are also well known for their depredations on the livestock imported by the colonists Rizzio became very popular. Sarah spent most of her time in the Psionic Radio office at the spaceport. Some days I went out with Rizzio, other days I accompanied Sarah. Being neither a gunsel nor a telepath I wasn't sorry when the *Dratted Twins*, as she was affectionately called,

dropped down from the cloudy sky to the apron.

The *Dratted Twins* took us to Waverley, where all of us enjoyed watching the pomp and ceremony of that rather absurd little autonomous, Jacobean kingdom. From Waverley we traveled in *Flora Macdonald* to Elsinore, one of the planets in the so-called Shakespearean Sector, and from Elsinore *Lost Horizon* carried us to Thule.

We were out on the Rim now, and all of us knew it. It was the wrong time of the year on Thule, the time of the year when the night sky was empty of all but the dim and incredibly distant nebulosities that were island universes. It was the time of the year when hardly anybody went out at night, and when those who did so kept their eyes on the ground and never looked up to the forlorn heavens. It was the time of the year when Man's primordial fear of the dark reasserted itself, when the dread of the black nothingness outside was almost palpable.

It hit Rizzio, and it hit me, but it hit Sarah hardest of all. "It's the emptiness pressing in," she said. "Can emptiness press, Jim? Doesn't it make nonsense of all that you've ever learned of physics? But this emptiness presses—or it may be that our expanding galaxy is pressing against it . . . It's the fear. Everybody is telepathic after a fashion, you know, and the fear builds up. These Rim Worlds are no more

than vast psionic amplifiers, far more powerful than those pitiful dogs' brains we use in the ships and the shore stations."

I pulled her to me and held her tightly. We were by ourselves in my room at the Rimrock Hotel—Rizzio had found a pistol range and was working off his unease in a thunderous practice session. I held her tightly, and it was the first time in all the long voyage out from Earth that I had touched her. I felt comfort in her nearness. I like to think that she felt comfort in mine.

"This helps a little," she said, "but only a little. The fear is still there, the fear and the loneliness."

"Are you sure that you want to go through with this?" I asked. "Luigi and I can carry on—after all, we're officers of the Survey Service and under orders. You're not. The *Sundowner* blasts off tomorrow for Nova Caledon, and she'll take you well on your way back to Earth."

She thrust her way out of my arms.

"What do you take me for?" she demanded. "You and Luigi may be officers of the Survey Service—but I'm a graduate of the Rhine Institute—and never once has any of us run from the Unknown."

I said, "I'm glad you're staying. But I wish you weren't."

"Why are you glad? So that this investigation of yours can proceed with my help?"

"No. Personal reasons. And the same applies to my wishing

that you'd get out of here and and back to somewhere safe."

"I'd be lying," she said, "if I told you that this was all a big surprise. You aren't a very good transmitter, but you're good enough at close range. It's rather a pity, darling, that you can't receive what I'm thinking . . ."

"You can tell me," I said, taking her in my arms again.

She was telling me when Rizzio came back, and the continuation of all she wanted to say had to be deferred to a later date.

Getting from Thule to Kinsolving wasn't easy. The Rim Worlds are dependent upon shipping, but there is very little traffic along the Rim itself. The Governor of Thule promised us every assistance—but there was very little assistance that he could give. Frankly, I wasn't much worried about it. I was with Sarah, and we knew how we felt about each other, and I was willing to wait ten years, if needs be, for transport. Unluckily Sarah didn't share my sentiments—on the transport question, that is. She was very much a Woman With A Mission and would never be really happy until the mission was accomplished. It was worse for her, of course, than it was for me. She was the telepath. I felt only the vague unease but she was conscious all the time of that all-pervading fear of the dark. That fear of hers was dangerous, too, especially at night when she half awoke and subconsciously used

her pyrotic powers to dispel the darkness. I got into the habit of making sure that there was absolutely nothing of an inflammable nature in her room before I left her each night.

Rizzio was getting impatient, too.

"I've lugged my guns more than halfway across the Galaxy," he would growl. "I want to use 'em on something better than paper targets."

Then, after we had been on Thule for over three weeks, the *Lady Faraway* dropped in. She had been an Epsilon Class tramp owned by the Commission. She was still a tramp, but now wore the house-flag of Rim Runners, Incorporated, a one-ship company. Her Master was a retired Survey Service Commander and proved sympathetic and helpful. Between us we worked out a plan of campaign. I would blast off in a second-hand lifeboat at the same time as *Lady Faraway*, making a rendezvous with her in orbit around Thule. We would then secure the boat to the ship, and *Lady Faraway* would break her journey from Thule to Ultimo long enough to cast us off within easy rocket range of Kinsolving. On her return to Thule, two weeks later, she would pick us up. Sarah was confident of her ability to keep in touch with the tramp's Psionic Radio Officer.

That was the scheme, and it worked. Luigi and Sarah rode with me in the boat—such craft are just a little large to operate single-handed, especially when

there is any spatial maneuvering to be done. We made our rendezvous with *Lady Faraway* without any trouble. We pulled ourselves across the small gap between the two craft and, in a matter of minutes, were in the tramp's control room staring out at the shimmering glory of the Galactic lens. After that dismal night sky on Thule we couldn't see enough of it.

The voyage to Kinsolving passed pleasantly enough. Most of the time we were content to sip our drinks and let the skipper tell us stories about the Rim, stories that bore out what Warburton had said about the general oddness that exists in that part of the Galaxy. The most fantastic thing, however, was the way in which the Rim Dwellers seemed to take them for granted. The occasional phantom ship in their skies was no more to them than a rainbow in our skies is to us. The queer wreckage that fell on *Faraway* was melted down and broken up long before anybody thought of making a proper investigation. The ship from nowhere that appeared off Dunsinane and that was commandeered and manned by the people of that planet, only to vanish into the nothingness from which it had come, was practically laughed off as just one of those things.

"You get this way out on the Rim," said the Captain, sensing our bewilderment. "If you didn't, you'd be round the bend in next to no time. If I'd been Captain

Spence I shouldn't have considered a spot of wet paint anything worth writing home about."

"But it was *odd*," I said.

"Everything out here is odd. I have my own private theory, and that is that Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is the only law of nature that's valid in these parts."

"And how does it apply to wet paint?" I asked.

"Like this, Lieutenant. Twenty thousand years ago a caveman painted two pictures. One died, the other one didn't."

"It doesn't satisfy me," I said.

"Or me," said Sarah.

"When I take aim," said Luigi, "it'd take more than the Uncertainty Principle to make the bullet go elsewhere than where it was supposed to."

"There are such things as misfires," said the Captain.

I've often wondered if he was really serious about his pet theory. It didn't seem to apply to his own navigation. *Lady Faraway* flickered back into the normal continuum no more than a thousand miles out from Kinsolving and, after we had bidden our hosts farewell, we transferred from the ship to the boat.

I had charts of the planet and was able to find the spaceport, which was in the daylit hemisphere, without trouble. When we hit the outer fringes of the atmosphere Sarah received a message from the ship to say that she would stand by until we

had actually landed. When the boat touched down on the patch of lighter, newer green that marked the place where Captain Spence's *Epsilon Eridani* had incinerated the growth covering the apron, Sarah told *Lady Far-away* that we were safely down.

"Good luck," they told us. "Good hunting."

We opened the door of the little airlock and climbed down to the ground. It was late afternoon of a fine day—fine, but oppressive. It may have been the heavy gravity, it may have been the excess of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. It may have been something else. In any case, a derelict spaceport with a ghost town in the middle distance is not conducive to cheerfulness.

We had with us a helicopter—a flimsy, collapsible affair but capable of carrying three people, with their supplies, for not too great a distance. The remainder of the day we spent assembling the brute. I am not, I admit, an engineer. As far as Rizzio was concerned the only machinery for which he had any aptitude was of the lethal variety. I hate to have to admit it, but Sarah did most of the work. Tools behaved themselves in her hands. Nuts seemed almost to tighten themselves. Perhaps they did. Her telekinetic talent was of value.

When it was dark we made a meal from our self-heating cans of food. We were all tired. We wasted no time in getting to bed. Sarah and I slept in the boat. Luigi arranged his sleeping bag

below the landing gear. I remember that he grinned whitely and patted the butts of his holstered automatics and said that they were the best bed companions on a world like Kinsolving. Sarah was rather shocked and annoyed when I laughed; I thought for a while that she was going to make me keep Rizzio company.

Sarah slept badly—which meant that I did too.

She said, "I wish that I could explain it to you—but it's like trying to explain visual images to a blind man. How can I put it? It's like what I felt on Thule, the fear of the dark, but more intense. Much more intense. Could it be, do you think, that somehow the psychic emanations of all the Rim Worlds are focused here on Kinsolving?"

"You, my darling, are the expert," I said.

She told me that I was no help at all. Then, after a little while, she woke me up again.

"There was a colony here," she said. "They were taken off at their own request. Why?"

"As far as I can gather, they just didn't like it here," I said.

"They felt the same as I'm feeling," she said, "and it was strong enough, even with non-telepaths, to make them clamor for evacuation."

"Could be," I said.

"You're the co-ordinator," she told me.

"Even co-ordinators must sleep," I told her.

And so it went on. When morn-

ing came the pair of us were like pieces of chewed string. Rizzio was bright and breezy and repeated his remark about bed companions. Neither of us really thought that it was funny.

We loaded the flimsy helicopter and climbed into the little cabin. I was rather surprised that the thing lifted, but it did so, albeit with a marked reluctance. We flew low—we had no option—following the route marked on Captain Spence's chart. We saw little of interest, the scenery in general was too Earthlike. In any case, I was spending all my time praying that the collapsible aircraft wouldn't collapse in mid-air.

We found the valley—it was the only one with a deep canyon at its upper end. We landed by the river. We unloaded from the helicopter what we would need—the powerful torches, the camera, the balls of twine, a Minetti automatic apiece for Sarah and myself. Luigi, of course, was wearing his usual assortment of personal artillery. He would have looked naked without it. Both Sarah and I felt, as we thrust the little pistols into the holsters at our belts, that we were wearing fancy dress.

We found the cave.

The end of the ball of twine paid out by the Mate of *Epsilon Eridani* was still there. We squabbled a little as to which of us should take the lead. Finally, I was able to convince the others that as official leader of the ex-

pedition I should go first. Rizzio, his heavy pistols drawn and ready, brought up the rear.

As caves go it was a nice enough cave. There wasn't any spectacular stalactites and stalagmites—neither were there the hordes of swooping, squeaking bats or the like that one finds all too often. The floor was reasonably smooth, reasonably level. The sand still bore the imprint of the feet of Captain Spence and his party.

We found the first chamber with its paintings. We did not need to make a round of the walls prodding with an experimental forefinger. The paint was dry—and it was old.

We found the second chamber. There was, at the end of it, a half-finished painting. A flash bulb flared as Sarah photographed it. We waited until our eyes had recovered from the sudden glare, then looked at the picture by the light of our torches. It was not the same as the others. They showed men attacking animals—*this* depicted men attacking men.

Cautiously, I went forward, putting out my finger. It came away from the flat wall smeared with black and orange. I smelled it. There was the acrid tang of charcoal, the pungent stink of rancid animal fat.

"Sarah," I said. "Captain Spence was right. There is somebody painting in this cave. Can you *feel* anybody? Is it some half-crazed survivor of a shipwreck? Is it somebody who was

left behind when the colony was evacuated?"

"Human . . ." she murmured, her eyes shut and a look of intense concentration on her face. "Human—but not of Earth. There's anger, and resentment, and it's closing in . . ." Her eyes snapped open. "Jim! Luigi! We'd better get out of here—and fast!"

Then we saw him.

He was standing there, glaring at us. He was human enough, if one discounted the furry, pointed ears. There was little about him of the ancestral ape. He was all of six feet tall and was slenderly built. The dark eyes in the thin dark face were intelligent. He wore a kilt of stinking, half-cured hide of some kind. His hands and forearms were spattered with the primitive pigments that he had been using. He looked at the smear on the wall that I had made. He looked at my stained hands.

"Tell him we're friends!" I said urgently to Sarah.

She said, "I'm trying. He does not want to hear me. He's shutting me out."

"If he starts anything . . ." growled Luigi.

I turned to look at him. He was poised, tense, his heavy pistols ready. I hoped that the unarmed artist wouldn't start anything and wondered if I'd be able to stop Rizzio from doing him serious injury.

The caveman, still glaring at me, said something.

"He is angry with you," said Sarah. "Very angry."

"Try and get the idea across that I apologize for smudging his painting," I said.

"I am trying."

What followed was, I know, quite inexcusable. Somehow, the three of us, even Rizzio, were concentrating upon that one artist, trying to convey our apologies. We should have left it to our specialist, Sarah. Luigi should have been alert for other dangers. I, as co-ordinator, should have seen to it that each of the others was doing his or her own job. But, somehow, that spoiled painting was for all of us the most important thing in the Universe.

We were unprepared for what happened. We were taken by surprise by the volley of stones, flung with considerable force and accuracy from the shadows. Luigi cursed as his pistols were dashed from his hands. One of them went off, the noise of it in that confined space deafening. One stone hit my right wrist so that I dropped the torch, another caught me fairly in the belly. I heard Sarah scream as the light was smashed from her grasp. I was on the cave floor then, doubled up with agony and gasping for breath. I was aware of the scuffle going on around me and over me. Hard, naked feet kicked the breath from me—what little breath I had remaining after the initial blow. Something hit me violently on the side of the head and I lost consciousness.

Returning to my senses was a slow and painful process. The first thing of which I was aware was pain—pain in my head, pain all over my bruised body, pain at my wrists and ankles. I tried to raise my hands to my throbbing temples, found that they were tied. I opened my eyes slowly, was conscious of the flickering redness of firelight.

Then I saw Sarah. She was lying not far from me. She was naked, and trussed, as I was trussed, with what looked like strips of hide. A dreadful fear came over me.

Before I could speak, she said, "It's all right. These people don't find me at all attractive—they prefer their women much meatier. The only one who *might* be interested is the artist, but he'll have to have the Chief's permission first . . ."

Rizzio, also naked, was just beyond her. He ignored us. He was glaring at the men sitting around the fire. They—squat, chunky savages—were pawing our clothing and possessions with interest. It was obvious, even to a non-telepath like myself, that the gunman regarded the alien hands on his precious firearms almost as a woman would regard her violation.

A little apart from the others sat the artist. He was more interested in us than in what we had worn, what we had carried. I thought with a chill of what Sarah had said, but I knew that, to him, the first thing of real

importance was to depict us in imperishable paint on the eternal stone.

"If these people are cannibals," I said bitterly, "I wish that they'd eaten the Initial Survey Team!"

"You can say that again!" growled Luigi. "When we get back—if we get back—I hope that you put in a stinking report!"

That "if" coming from Luigi was rather shocking—but the loss of his guns had made him feel even more naked and helpless than Sarah and myself.

"Before you start blaming them," said Sarah softly, "just try to work things out . . . Tell me, Jim, have you ever known an Initial Survey to miss a whole tribe of intelligent natives?"

"No. But there has to be a first time for everything."

"Do you really think that they could have remained undetected when this world was colonized—an entire tribe . . . ?"

"It seems doubtful, Sarah. But how else . . . ?"

"I," she said, "am your specialist in certain matters. I'll tell you now that psychic emanations can be focused just as light can be focused—and that, obviously, is what has happened here. To work it out properly I'd have to be an astronomer, which I'm not—but it seems to me that this planet—although perhaps not all the time—gets the full force of the . . . fear generated upon a dozen or so of the colonized Rim Worlds. It was that omnipresent

dread that made the colonists here demand to be taken off.

"Now—what is that fear? It's a simple one—and a primitive one. Fear of the dark. It's a fear that we've inherited from our forebears, who lived lives very similar to those of these people. It's that intense fear that, beating on and around this planet, has pulled these people from their own time to ours . . ."

"Which could," I said slowly, "account for the way in which they vanished. They vanished not in Space, but in Time . . ."

"Then how was it that Captain Spence didn't see them, but found only the wet paint?" asked Rizzio, glad of something to take his mind off the way in which his precious weapons were being pawed by greasy, alien hands.

"I think I can account for that," I said. "He landed here, you remember, to recalibrate his Mannschenn Drive controls. The temporal fields generated by his Drive must have thrown the natives back to their own Time."

"All very interesting," he muttered, "in an academic sort of way. But, as you reminded us Sarah—you're the telepath. What's cooking?" He essayed a not at all funny jest. "Will it be us?"

"I'm afraid so," she said. "Unless . . ."

"Unless what?" I asked sharply.

"There might be a way . . ." she said slowly. "After all, I'm an all-rounder—and that's part

of the trouble. I can feel as these people feel. These paintings of theirs, of course, have a certain magical significance. The artist depicts men hunting and killing animals—and thereby makes a spell to ensure that the hunt will be successful. *Somebody* — we know that it was Captain Spence and his crew—damaged the paintings and broke the spell. The cavemen knew from the evidence of footprints and such that it was human beings who were responsible—so the artist made more magic to bring the culprits to book. By all the laws of Absolute Ethics they're the injured parties."

"Absolute tomfoolery!" snarled Rizzio.

He spoke too loudly.

One of the cavemen left the group by the fire, lurched across to us and struck him heavily across the mouth. Rizzio spat blood and a broken tooth. If looks could have killed his eyes would have been far more deadly than his guns ever had been.

We were all of us silent for a while, listening to the meaningless chatter of the primitives. We watched as one of the men managed to insert his huge frame into Rizzio's blouse and shorts, listened to the laughter as the material split at the seams. I began to wonder what would happen when they became too curious about the firearms. There, just possibly, might lie our salvation. But they seemed to know, somehow, that the

things were weapons and treated them with great respect.

I whispered, "I can see your point, Sarah, although I don't agree with you. Surely, there must be a way . . ."

She murmured, "There is. You will see. Be ready for anything, both of you."

My wrists were numb, and it was some little time before I became aware of the odd sensation. Like a little snake, it was, slithering over the skin. My hands were tied behind me, and I could not see what was happening. I was afraid. I thought that it was a snake. I dare not move lest I infuriate the thing and cause it to use its poison fangs.

Then there was the same sensation at my ankles. There I could see what it was that was going on. Slowly, the crude knots in the strips of hide were coming untied. I looked at Sarah, saw from her rapt expression that she was concentrating hard, remembered that telekinesis was among her talents.

Slowly, circulation returned to feet and hands. It was painful in the extreme. Even so, I was able to see that Luigi was now free and that Sarah's bonds were loosening themselves. I could tell that the gunman was tensing himself for a wild leap towards the heap of our possessions by the fire, that he hoped to be able to snatch his pistols and slaughter our captors.

"Don't!" I growled at him. "Don't!"

Some of the tension went out of him, but not much.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Let Sarah play this hand."

"Yes," she said. "Leave it to me."

Once again we were making too much noise. Once again the same brute who had silenced us before left his seat by the fire, began to lurch towards us.

Suddenly there was a scream from the wall of the cave against which the women were huddled. Little tongues of flame had sprung up among the dried bracken which seemed to be their communal bed. A child ran from the group, her hair ablaze.

"Damn!" muttered Sarah. "I didn't mean . . ."

More flames were springing up—from our untidily piled clothing, from the hide aprons worn by the men. Our self-appointed guard yelled as he pulled his smouldering garment from him.

"Now!" shrieked Sarah.

Rizzio and I were on our feet at once. I pulled Sarah to hers. Rizzio sprang for the fire, pushing the astonished and panicking savages out of his way. Careless of burns, he snatched up his two point five automatics.

"Luigi!" Sarah was screaming. "No. No! I promised . . ."

The guns spoke, jumping in Rizzio's hands. I heard him cursing above the staccato, echoing thunder of the discharges. Even in the excitement and fear of the moment I could see that all his shots were going wild.

Rough hands grabbed my shoulder. I let go of Sarah, turned to fight off my attacker. It was the artist. He evaded the blow that I swung at him, caught Sarah by the wrist, began to drag her towards the exit of the chamber. I stumbled after them, became aware that Luigi was by my side. Behind us the fire had spread and a barrier of flame was, for the time being, at least, holding off pursuit and giving us enough light to see the way, enough light to see the pale form of the girl, the darker shape of her captor.

They had stopped running. The caveman was squatting on the sandy floor, his arms making strange, sweeping movements. Sarah stood beside him.

"I've still one round!" gasped Rizzio, raising his right hand to fire.

"Luigi!" Sarah's voice was peremptory. "Put that thing down. At once!"

"But . . ."

"Better do as she says," I told him.

"And watch where you're walking!" she ordered.

We approached the pair cautiously. The caveman, I saw, was drawing rapidly in the sand, sketching an outline with swift, sure strokes. With consummate artistry he suggested the hunger of the animal that he was drawing, its hunger and its viciousness. It didn't look the sort of beast that I'd want to meet on a dark night. It didn't look the sort

of beast that I'd want to meet at high noon.

There was another tunnel running at right angles to the one that we were in. From it came an ominous snuffling sound, the scraping of sharp talons on rock. I looked at the primitive, yet vigorous, outline in the sand and visualized all too clearly the spiny, long-snouted, sharp-toothed thing that was coming towards us.

The artist whipped off his breech-clout, flung it back the way we had come. Then, catching Sarah's hand again in his, he started to run. We followed. For the last part of the journey we were traveling blind and I wished that Luigi had had the sense to grab our torches rather than his guns. Such an experience is bad enough when you are fully clothed and stoutly shod. Luigi and I were torn and bleeding when we emerged into the open air at last. Sarah and the artist were almost unscratched.

The helicopter was still there. Somehow—although we had to jettison some of our supplies—the cabin managed to hold all four of us. As we took off we heard an increasing uproar coming from the cavern and knew that the cavemen, not lacking in experience in dealing with the brute we had left to cover our escape, would almost certainly be victorious.

It was good to know that they wouldn't be able to reach us in our orbiting lifeboat.

It seemed a long time before

Lady Faraway, in response to the calls put out by Sarah and Raul, flickered into sight to pick us up. It was a long time, subjectively. It was a long time, that is, for Luigi and myself. Luigi was mourning the loss of his confidence in his hitherto invincible guns and, so far as I know, has never forgiven Sarah for the telekinetic interference that had ruined his aim.

"But I promised Raul," she told him. "I promised him that when he helped us to escape I would not let you use your weapons on his people . . ."

Luigi was mourning the loss of his marksman's confidence—and I was mourning the loss of Sarah.

"I still love you," she said, "in a way. But you're not a telepath, and you have no talent that could be trained and developed. Raul is a telepath—and other things. Look at it this way—could *you* live with a woman with whom you had no common language? I can talk to Raul as I could never talk to you."

"And you can love him as you never loved me," I said bitterly.

"But of course. And I can love him as I never loved any of my

fellow telepaths at the Institute. What attracted me to you was that you were a man of action. Raul is a man of action, too—and one of us."

So *Lady Faraway* picked us up and carried us back to Thule. Raul adjusted amazingly both during that voyage and thereafter—but he was living in Sarah's mind and she was living in his, so perhaps it wasn't so amazing after all. He must have done more adjusting on the long voyage back to Earth, but regarding that I have no firsthand knowledge. I made sure that I didn't travel in the same ships.

He's the darling of the Rhine Institute now, which body is having the time of its collective life investigating the sympathetic magic that must have been used by Earth's cavemen-artists in the distant past. They don't know yet how a picture of an animal ever had the power to influence the animal itself, but they hope to find out. They are trying to find out, too, if Raul's last painting on Kinsolving, the one showing men attacking men, *did* pull Sarah and Luigi and myself all the way across the Galaxy to the Rim.

THE END

At first there were the fairytales.
Then it was the Brittanica. Then
Shakespeare and Fort. Then the tests.
And always the dreams — and the
Dream. And all of it . . . and
none of it . . . was

VISIONARY

By HARLAN ELLISON and J. L. HENSLEY

*Under the pastel and quiet
skies their minds conversed.*

*"There is the need," they
thought, and: "They are ma-
turing," and: "Soon we will
be in the togetherness." And
they turned and watched the
quiet skies and the reaching
roof and spires in anticipa-
tion.*

I HAD this dream. I'd been having it for years before I knew it for something more than vague remembering. A child's dream, but it did not fade and change. It was a solemn dream, disquieting. And, after awhile, it became more real than the other things that I found in books and lived with.

There wasn't a great deal to it. Just an enormous building, the background around it pastel misty. The building was like a

great cathedral, and yet my feeling when I saw it was not religious, though it was akin to it. Always I seemed to be hanging far above it, struggling, but never reaching it. And I would awaken . . .

I knew, somehow, that everything would be right for me if I could find it. And I knew that I would someday.

But then, there was the dreaming: The architecture was odd and alien. It seemed to be many organ pipes, thrust down into a soil that was pinkish and fine. The pipes were set flush against one another, so that a great wall of rounded shapes rose up and fit the sky. The roof of the building was of a design I could not identify. Not Gothic and not Contemporary, but something that struck a chord at the rim of understandability.

There were openings here and there and the openings were unlike. Circular and squared apertures, originality in design in such depth that none of them could be called doors or windows with certainty. They were merely openings, for what purposes I knew not. I looked for one that would fit me.

And there was a shimmering-ness about the place.

That was my dream.

Over and over and over again. Waking was a sense of loss, sleeping was life.

There was a sorrow and a strangeness in me then and I grew differently than those who ran and played around me—my brothers and sisters. And because I was different, it was not an easy life.

My father and mother were second generation Italian Americans and my father was historically impressed by an early American patriot named White-law Martin. He was like that. My name bothered me until junior college. They constantly abbreviated it to "Whitey," and my hair was pitch black—that and a perfect body were the last vestiges of my Italian heritage. But there were a lot of other things that bothered me also. When you are a child you must run with the pack. I couldn't do it. At first my brothers fought my fights for me, stood up for me, but later I lost even my brothers. And I was strange, I know that. It took strong stimu-

lus to get through to me. Kid's games never did it. I found something that did and I buried myself in the daytime too.

Books.

At first there were fairy tales. I could lose myself in those fabled lands and the cathedral would become unnecessary for awhile. When I was ten I read through the *Brittanica* and I spouted facts until I was beaten to my knees. Then I learned that it is unwise to be wise. At fourteen I'd read almost everything that was worthwhile and lots that was not. I'd read Shakespeare and I could quote whole acts, I'd read the mad, brilliant ones like Fort and Nostradamus, I'd read Hemingway and Plato and *The Compleat Angler*.

And I grew away from those around me, without boyhood or regret for it. One day, when I was nineteen, and in college, I looked around me and saw that I was tolerated, but not loved. And the service was breathing at my heels for I'd lost interest in school.

I enlisted in the Force.

It was still the Air Force, but when they began making regular attempts Moonwards, it sounded ridiculous to call a unit that spent most of it's budget in attempting travel in a vacuum the "Air" Force. So the newspapers shortened it to Force.

I became a Forceman. That may sound dramatic, but it wasn't. At least, not at first.

I was trained and assigned as a hot-stuff drainage expert to a

coolant team, based with an ICBM unit in La Paz. Based there, but we did a lot of traveling.

It was during the travels—Borneo, Lebanon, Malta, the Arctic, Transylvania—that the dream ceased to trouble me. I looked for the building in every land and could not find it. But as the dream faded, so did the obsession retreat.

Oh, there were remembrances. On clear nights, when the stars were so painfully sharp they hurt my eyes, and I was pulling Guard Mount under them, then I'd remember the dream. But it was as if I'd put it aside, this dream that was almost a knowledge, and it was waiting for me, but willing to wait. As if it were saying: *My time will come.*

And yet I was not completely patient in my waiting. I collected buildings, much the way that many people collect books or stamps. I had pictures of every famous structure in the world, thousands of pictures. My favorite was a framed photo of a tiny Shintoist shrine, that had a vague, grudging resemblance to my dream building. But they were all wrong—Taj Mahal to ruined Ankor Wat—none of them really touched mine at all. So the fixation remained and I continued to look. The thirst could not be slaked, no matter how much I drank.

They were using liquid propellants then, and every once in a while we, or the Russkies,

would send up a one man job that would attempt to circle the Moon, or — occasionally — land there. But none came back. None of ours for sure and the Kremlin boys never claimed any for fear they'd have to substantiate the claim.

Marinelli was our first casualty. It was later confirmed he'd not tailed-in properly and had wound up on the moon like an egg—overheavy. Mojika, a Puerto Rican Forceman, was the second. His landing jacks crumpled on take-off and he died in the fallover explosion. The big two-man third ship made it out and went into orbit around the moon, but no word ever came from it. Number four landed on the moon and took off again. The pilot's name was McCafferty, and his name is at least as famous now as Einstein's. He died on the trip back—oxygen loss. There were ten more that they reported—and I suppose more that they didn't. I read about them all intensely.

The fights went on in the U. N., bickerings about territories that neither of us could really use; limited wars; police actions; border incidents; each nation striving to establish superiority over the other.

And then along came something out of a magician's hat and the egg was hatched. But I didn't know that—not yet.

They'd been giving these Force-wide tests. They were odd tests, unlike any I'd ever taken

before, there or anyplace else. The questions were odd and crazy and yet, sometimes, right and almost exciting to me in their familiarity—as if someone should have asked them of me long ago, so that I would know and they would know. There were questions about foods and smells and what you would do in a given situation. There were lots of these. But every once in awhile there was something else, like: “What do you think it would be like to die?” or “Have you ever felt apart from all places and things?” or “What is the loveliest thing that you can remember?” A question you could work your mind with.

And there were physicals, too. Good competent physicals, not like the required yearly exams.

The dreams came back then—nearer and closer. I was sorry when the tests were done, for the dream became sporadic again—as if it had again retreated.

Six weeks later I went on orders. They flew me out. A special plane landed for me alone.

I counted.

I had to show my orders exactly fourteen times from the minute I reached Bong Field until I was billeted there. I never saw so many guys with guns—off safety—even in a battle area. And they didn't just check my orders—they read them. Then they checked my face against my I. D. card and made me rattle off my service number. Then they fluoro-ed my retinas and took my

fingerprints and checked them against copies from my “master file.”

They'd taken a group of old hangars and put high fences around them. Real high and charged. Then they'd put a guard for every fifteen or twenty feet of fences. There was another fence inside the outer one and more guards. I guess they wanted to keep what they had inside. A close-mouthed captain took me to a barracks and there were other men bunked there. But that night the dream wasn't there. I couldn't sleep.

In the morning they started more tests on me and about thirty others who appeared to have been shipped in from almost everywhere. At first, physicals. The tests were similar to what had been taken before. After awhile they became more complicated. Doctors beat on me, and pinched me, and took my blood, and flashed lights at me, and depressed my tongue, and scraped bits of skin from me. Then they whirled me in a thing like a “whip” at the carnival and shot me up in an ejection seat. And I endured it all with the same vague excitement that I had endured the other tests. But no one came to tell us what we were here for.

They had us in two, old barracks. But by ones and twos and threes they eliminated until there were only six of us left. And whenever the taciturn captain came in I knew it was not for me—just knew it.

I got to know the other five pretty well. They were different from me in some ways. One of them was a big colored boy named Washington Jones. Then there was Samuels and Kahn, who was very tiny, and Pearson and Ludwig. They were all different from me—except the eyes.

When it got down to six, a colonel came into the barracks one day and pinned bars on our lapels and shook our hands.

I suppose we all knew, in a way, what was going on. We figured they'd found something and, from the tests, that we were their guinea pigs.

The dream was very close now. It was as though I was reliving a bit of my childhood. I saw myself up there again—my face, the same child's face I'd always had, with the wide eyes and the freckles and the black, black hair and the slash of a mouth, wide and frowning. But the body was different. It was bigger than life, man-plus. Hard and ripplingly-muscled, tall and golden, like a God out of a Greek myth. I was that god.

I recognized the egocentricity of it, naturally, but my cathedral waited beneath me. And I awoke.

The barracks was quiet around me. Most of the bunks were empty now. There was dim light. I lit a cigarette and tried to rationalize.

Another spot of red bloomed from a nearby bunk and Washington Jones's voice said softly: "You awake, Fazio?"

I grunted.

"I been working it over in my mind," he said. "Why we're here—why I'm here. I'm afraid. All my life I've been waiting for something to happen to me. Now that it is, I'm afraid of it and want it."

"Do you ever dream?" I asked.

His voice was almost lost: "I dream, but I can't share it." When his voice came again it was hesitant: "Did you ever read Charles Fort, Fazio?"

"A long time ago."

"Remember what he said about time?" he asked, his voice growing in strength. "That there are ages in which certain occurrences are predestined to happen. Not by divine ordinance, but just because it's their time to happen. The time of the wheel and the steam engine and the automobile. And if someone comes up with one too early, there's a singular, almost mystical, disregard of the invention. As though the world were snubbing it till it was ready for it."

I felt the excitement grow a little again and what he said was right and it fit inside me—in with my dream.

And I lay there and thought about it and for a long time we were silent.

I was almost back to sleep when I heard him muttering to himself. "*What time is it now, Washington Jones? What time is it now?*"

I checked Charles Fort out of the library next day and read

him through. Once Jones saw me with the book and we grinned at each other self-consciously. But the book did not engender in me the kind of excitement that I'd hoped for. He was quite brilliant and quite mad.

Yet the dream persisted and Jone's concept was some part of it and something to mull over in my spare time.

Which was something I had little of.

Because they started the question and answer tests again.

Those tests—sometimes I felt like slamming a wall. Tests unlike any that I'd known existed. Ponder the significance of this:

Do you lose things constantly? (If answer is "yes" indicate how often, what type of thing lost, where found, mental condition at time of recovery, and any other emotional data.)

On some days the questions came as adjuncts to weird movies. I remember some of them. The first was a reel of Kaleidoscopic wheeling and whirling and shunting from one hue to another. Before it was done I felt as if I was beaten and torn. I felt as if the future had vanished and swallowed me.

The question was: *What are your feelings about death in the abstract? In the specific?* (Do not use qualifiers.)

Later there was an existentialist movie about sadism, and a rose, and a fruitless love affair between a cripple and a girl with one eye. There was a miracle in the end. I didn't understand the

picture, but I didn't want the lights to come back on.

Question two was: *What is your stand on God?* Answer bluntly, avoid partisan religious referents, where possible.

They gave us one more that first day. It was a movie about a man who dreamed strange dreams and who thought he was insane. The man made it seem very real—chillingly real.

And the question was: *Have you ever dreamed that you could fly or thought that you were flying without the use of any mechanical aid?*

That one I had real trouble with. I answered it finally by saying that I had, "in my childhood."

And so it went. For better than a week. That sort of question. Some that were almost nonsense, some that were so sharp and keen that the point penetrated deep within me.

They told us we were not to discuss the questions in the barracks. So we did of course. At great length. And there were a lot of theories, but nothing concrete.

But finally they told us.

There was this little man. He couldn't have been much over forty, but he wore the star of a brigadier. He was a Doctor Something, I later found out it was "Stein," a psychiatrist, with degrees in things that ran from linguistics to physics and a mind that worked like a fine computer. He must have come here

voluntarily from some other country, I never found out which. His eyes were sad behind heavy-lensed glasses and his voice was thick with the heritage of Central Europe. He was rough to understand, but I felt an instinctive liking for him.

When he talked—we listened. "It's different up there," he said. "We know that. On the few flights we've made we've found a great deal. And still we know very little."

He looked out around the room and his eyes behind those poker-chip-thick lenses were lost in the big dream, the thwarted longing. "The things we do here don't work well out there—the staminas that we have mean little. Our laws of logic, our world's ethical structure, most of what we've postulated, holds untrue. It's as if when the force of gravity, of Earth-touching, is lost, everything else is lost too. It's cost some good lives and it's made us change our method of selection."

"And now we're going out further than ever before. We're going out—all the way to the stars. We have the means to do it. And you men are specially qualified to do it for us."

The room rippled with sound around me. My pulse sprinted and I forced calmness, so that I would not miss the words.

"We have asked you questions that made you feel we were," he smiled, "not quite right in the head.

"But the questions had a purpose—some to shock you into a non-conformist awareness—some to tell us things about you the Force-wide tests merely hinted." He leaned forward on the podium. "Each of you is a loner. Each of you has the ability to exist no matter what conditions exist around you, remaining essentially yourselves, with no great personality change. There is a segment of the brain that does not work well under the pressure of gravity, but which tends to become dominant when gravity is removed as a factor. There are other areas that only work when gravity is present. We theorize that there are other areas that will work only under conditions produced by excelling the speed of light. We have not been lucky with men in space so far. Yet we have learned. We feel that we'll be luckier now that we know—now that we are able to look for qualities such as you have." He looked out at us and I felt both excited and queasy. And I explored me and lost myself in what he was saying. What was he saying, actually? Psi? I knew something about that and Rhine. There were remarks about the cortex and four-fifths of the brain inactive, and random reflexes. And after awhile I only understood a word here and there.

But I understood his ending. "We know the ship will work. There have been tests. We are more interested now in studying human behavior—in finding out

if man can actually get out to the stars. The mechanisms in the ship are either 'fail-safe,' or 'no-fail' and you will be passengers only, until, as we hope, you recover orientation. We have built our ship around a special bank of instruments, which will be closely telemetered, to record every awareness that you encounter.

"Do any of you wish to volunteer?"

I put my own hand up and then looked around. There were five more hands up. My hand felt wet in the moving currents of the room, but my throat was dry.

Stein smiled. "We'll have to draw lots."

Whitelaw Fazio's luck. I pulled second. Ludwig pulled first, the star-marked ballot. He was the man to go to the stars. I felt a deep disappointment when I saw his exultant eyes.

And yet there was relief, too.

"Do any of you want to ask questions?" Dr. Stein asked, when the lottery was done.

Washington Jones's hand went up. "Sir," he said, "what have we discovered that will let us get to the stars? As far as we knew, a few months back, they couldn't even get one of the stage ships back."

The glasses came up and shone in the light. The face went a little strange. "I have a degree in physics too, Mr. Jones. I was working on something else, something more in my own field

of interest and I stumbled onto what we now call a 'force-bead-generator.' It goes beyond nuclear physics. It gives a sure, never failing power."

Washington Jones looked over at me and it hit me then.

Fort's theory about the Era of Anything. This was the Time for Space Travel. All the sput-nicks were done, all the fudgings with Vanguards and barely-manned flights that had tried to put-put to the Moon and back on a prayer and Scotch tape were abortive and premature. But now the baby was ready to be born, so ready that a psychiatrist, trying to find something else, could discover it and recognize its significance. So maybe Fort had been right.

A week before the take-off, Ludwig woke up one day feeling badly.

It turned out to be a burst appendix, so they operated.

Ludwig would be laid up for a long time.

Fazio was the man for the job.

I was ferried out to White Sands and received my penultimate briefings from Doctor Stein, who was in charge of the project, I'd learned.

He was nervous when he talked to me and he was envious, too. He kept talking about how the acceleration would take me through what he called "Bounces" or "Progressions" (which he was quick to tell me had nothing to do with the fantasy ideas involving a hyper-

space.) I felt, listening to him, like a human guinea pig should feel. At least he seemed to know what he was talking about.

I hoped.

He said that they had sent six of the ships out on remote control voyages and that five of them had returned.

So I listened to him numbly and the week went by and I waited.

The night before take-off my dream was back so near and close that I seemed but inches away. I saw my fluted- organ-pipe cathedral and me above it. I came awake all sweat and tears for the building had talked to me and though I couldn't recall now what had been said, I was scared. I lay there and wrestled with myself and my desires for a long time. Then I called Doctor Stein. I felt like I had to, even if it took my chance away. For if I was insane then I might be the cause of something that would set us back years.

His answer was both assuring and discomfoting.

"All of you have had that dream, or one similar to it. All six of you." He looked at me and his face mirrored a felt inadequacy. "I never dream," he said softly.

It wasn't much of a ship, as far as size. When you're used to the three-stage monstrosities, you'd expect a starship to be that much more impressive, that much larger. But it wasn't.

It was just a teardrop, with a

small room in the bulge that was mine. There were extrudable wings and tail for atmosphere landings, wherever I was going, and a cleverly geared set of drop-wheels guaranteed to hold on the shifتيest desert or marsh. And in my cubicle, all around, there were instruments.

There were instruments that watched me, instruments that hooked into me, fed me, bathed me, relieved me, metered me, and weighed me.

I said good-bye to the others and on the proper day, at the proper time, they locked me into the cubicle. And somewhere the countdown began. But I didn't know that. I'd been drugged. Lying on my gelatin-pad couch, I was insensitive to the rustlings and clangings and preparations. A machine was carrying me, on orders set forth by another machine, using calculations done by a third. I'd have manual control only when I came within safe range of that star, and then only if a machine decided I should.

Which star? A machine would calculate that, too.

I had the distinct impression I was supercargo on this flight. And yet, more essential than the finest, most cleverly made machine ever assembled. I was grateful that machines did not have whims or temperament.

I slept while things happened and men sweated. I slept while pencils toted figures from graph-dials. I slept while a tiny bead of cadmium and thirty-six other trace metals built a flux field of

force around itself, while the Earth whirled blindly beneath me. I slept while people died and others were reborn in the story which had no answer—then.

The ship was towed into its berth, and I tossed restlessly and then did not toss at all when the force bead unleashed its power, throwing the tiny ship far into the darkness, and pushing me in pain and tearing back against the gel-pad. I did not waken while a soundless force pushed me past the speed of light in “progressions” and to a multitude of speeds, many speeds at one time, so that a new equation had to be made up to represent it.

But there wasn't any dream in this sleep. There was no need for the dream now. Reality was there in place of it.

Two eras can come together with logic. One era can bring another. It was the Time of Star Travel. It was *another* Time, too.

I was different when I awoke. I don't know what it was, but I was different. Not altered, just different. It wasn't in the blood or anyplace else that you could examine it or put a microscope on it. It was just—how can I put it?—have you ever seen a goldfish bowl after the water has been in it for a few days? All bubbled and odd-looking, not at all clear the way it had been at first. Well, that was me. All bubbled and changed, but still the same in most things. Yet this

was more than a chemical change, more than a virus.

I was better, somehow.

Look: who knows what we are or where we're going?

The theories of yesterday are gone today and the theories of today will be gone tomorrow.

A law is something that works.

Change the circumstances, go beyond what a law explicitly governs—the law is no longer applicable.

I was completely alive. I existed with curiosity, like it had been when I was a child and there was much to learn. Waiting to see what I was and what there was to learn. There was a calmness. There was a complete absence of tension. There was no psychosis. The aloneness did not touch me then . . . for I was meant to be alone.

I remained in that tranquil state for a long time. Months perhaps. There are records.

The machines tended to me, and that was a good thing, for I was under the spell of that sense of comfort and rightness. Then, finally—

The star has no name—not now—not any more. But it was the only place and we knew a name for it once, a long time ago.

I could not have headed for any other place had I wanted to. Fate and Destiny had planned it that way; Fate and Destiny had been keeping steady company for a long, long time.

The machines ratcheted and catalogued and assayed, and the

ship slowed so the points of light in the darkness surrounding me were stationary again, instead of moving and wheeling.

There were twenty-one planets. I took the twelfth. Instinctively. The machines did not interfere with my course selection. Something told me number twelve—like a homing instinct. Does that sound too simple. Perhaps.

And I had my feeling of exultation.

I came down slowly. The planet was misty. A cotton batting atmosphere all misty and pastel and quiet. I did not bother to check whether the air was Earth-breathable. I knew it would be.

We have been lost a long, long time, I think. But it was a short time in the history of the race. Why we were allowed to remain lost, I do not yet know, but I will know.

I broke down through the clouds of pink mist, and it was where I'd known it would be. There is no such thing as Chance. In an ordered universe, all is planned.

It didn't look alien anymore, my cathedral. It looked like a home I'd once known, a long time before, and was seeing

again with eyes of reminiscence. I knew this place. I knew it with the fibers of my being; I knew it racially.

There had been something to psi and the powers of the mind. One of those powers, those faculties, was racial memory, damped out by time and Earth living, Earth gravity.

I knew it again.

It looked like *home*.

I knew that I was a part of it and that all of us are a part of it and that it was sitting there waiting for me or others like me—waiting for some inscrutable reason and purpose that I could not yet fathom.

It was there. The organ pipes towered. The strange apertures yawned.

I came down to land.

To see where we are going; to see what we are to become.

And I knew it would be stunning, what we are to become, for as the ship settled among the pastel ground-mists, beings of our heritage began to emerge from those strange apertures of the building.

It was the Cathedral of Man.

But man could not use those exits.

There were still changes to come. Many changes.

THE END

Memo From: The Editor

Memo To: You

Subject: Questionnaire

Some months ago you answered a questionnaire designed to help us edit *Amazing* as much to your tastes as possible. Now we are asking you to help out once again by filling out the very brief questionnaire below.

Frankly, we need your responses to aid our plans for increasing the magazine's advertising—so that potential advertisers can get a clear picture of the very special group of readers we have. The additional revenue will be plowed right back into the editorial budget to make *Amazing* consistently better.

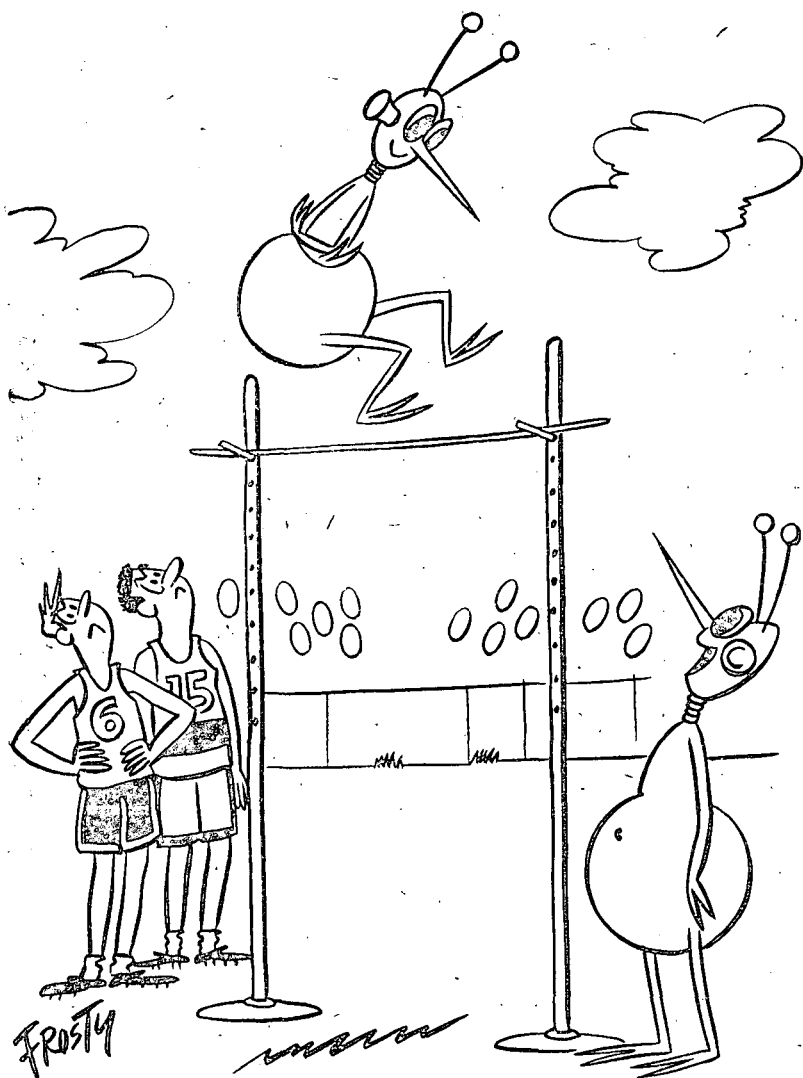
We need your help. We will appreciate it. We're counting on it. Address your answers to *AMAZING STORIES*, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York.

Thanks.

Cele Goldsmith

-
1. Are you: Male ☐ Female ☐
 2. Your age, please: _____
 3. Are you: Married ☐ Single ☐ Widowed ☐ Divorced ☐
 4. What is the last school you attended:
Grade School ☐ High School ☐ College ☐
Other _____ (Please specify)
 5. How long have you been reading *AMAZING*? _____
 6. How many issues have you read during the past year? _____
 7. How many, other than yourself, read your copy of *AMAZING*?
_____ people.
 8. What is your occupation? _____
 9. Are you the head of your household? Yes ☐ No ☐
a) If "No",—what is the main breadwinner's occupation?

 10. Would you please check the box that represents your family's annual income:
Under \$3,000 ☐ \$7,000—\$9,999 ☐
3,000—4,999 ☐ 10,000—14,999 ☐
5,000—6,999 ☐ 15,000 & over ☐



"Since they were nice enough to let us enter their games, maybe we shouldn't use our gravitational controls."

THE GALAXY PRIMES

By E. E. SMITH

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

Synopsis of Previous Installments

Two men and two women—the greatest brains of the planet Earth—set forth on mankind's strangest adventure: to see if intergalactic space-ships can be navigated and powered by the force of the human mind.

They are: Clee Garlock and James James, brown-haired Lola Montandon and green-haired, fiery-tempered Belle Bellamy. Each is a Gunther First—a mind capable of using the tremendous psionic powers of the Gunther Field, an electrogravitic field which raised telepathy, teleportation, telekinesis and the other functions of the mind to unparalleled heights. Many humans are capable of Gunthering at various levels. But only a handful are Operators or Prime Operators—as far above Gunther Firsts in their command of mental powers as a Gunther First is above a puppy.

The four Prime Operators in the starship Pleiades—despite the machinations of Alonso Ferber, Chancellor of Solar System Enterprises—lift their ship to intergalactic space.

Garlock, James and their girl companions feud their way through a series of adventures. The Primes battle among themselves to thrash out their personal rivalries. Lola and Garlock, Belle and James agree to switch partners for the remainder of the voyage. Lola and James formally marry.

After another adventure on a strange world—in which the Primes clean up a world of destructive Ozobes—they track down the secret of guiding the Gunther Drive to a specific destination. The only possible director of a Gunther Drive, it turns out, is a human mind which is a cut above Prime. Garlock opens a new Gunther cell in his mind, becomes a Super-Prime. Belle reaches the same point. Lola and James cannot.

To test their new-found ability to control the Gunther Drive, the Super-Primes bring the ship back to Earth, but refuse to report to Ferber, and move out into the Galaxy again. This time they set up plans to organize the Galaxy for peace. Creating themselves officers of the Galactic Service of the United Galaxian Societies, they Gunther to the planet Margonia.

Contact is established with Supreme Grand Marshal Entlore of Nargoda, the most powerful nation. After impressing Entlore and his staff with their powers, the Galaxy Primes are feted by the Nargodans, who seemingly accept the Galaxian order forbidding intragalactic or intergalactic aggression. The Primes are accompanied back to the Pleiades by Nargoda's communications officer Flurnoy. A beauteous redhead, she is entranced by Garlock. Belle Bellamy is not entranced by her.

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 7

SINCE everyone, including the Sebullient ComOff, slept late the following morning, they all had brunch instead of breakfast and lunch. All during the meal Garlock was preoccupied and stern.

"Hold everything for a while, Jim," he said, when everyone had eaten. "Before we move, Belle and I have got to have a conference."

"Not a Fatso Ferber nine-o'clock type, I hope." James frowned in mock reproach and ComOff Flurnoy cocked an eyebrow in surprise. "Monkey-business on company time is only for Big Shots like him; not for small fry such as you."

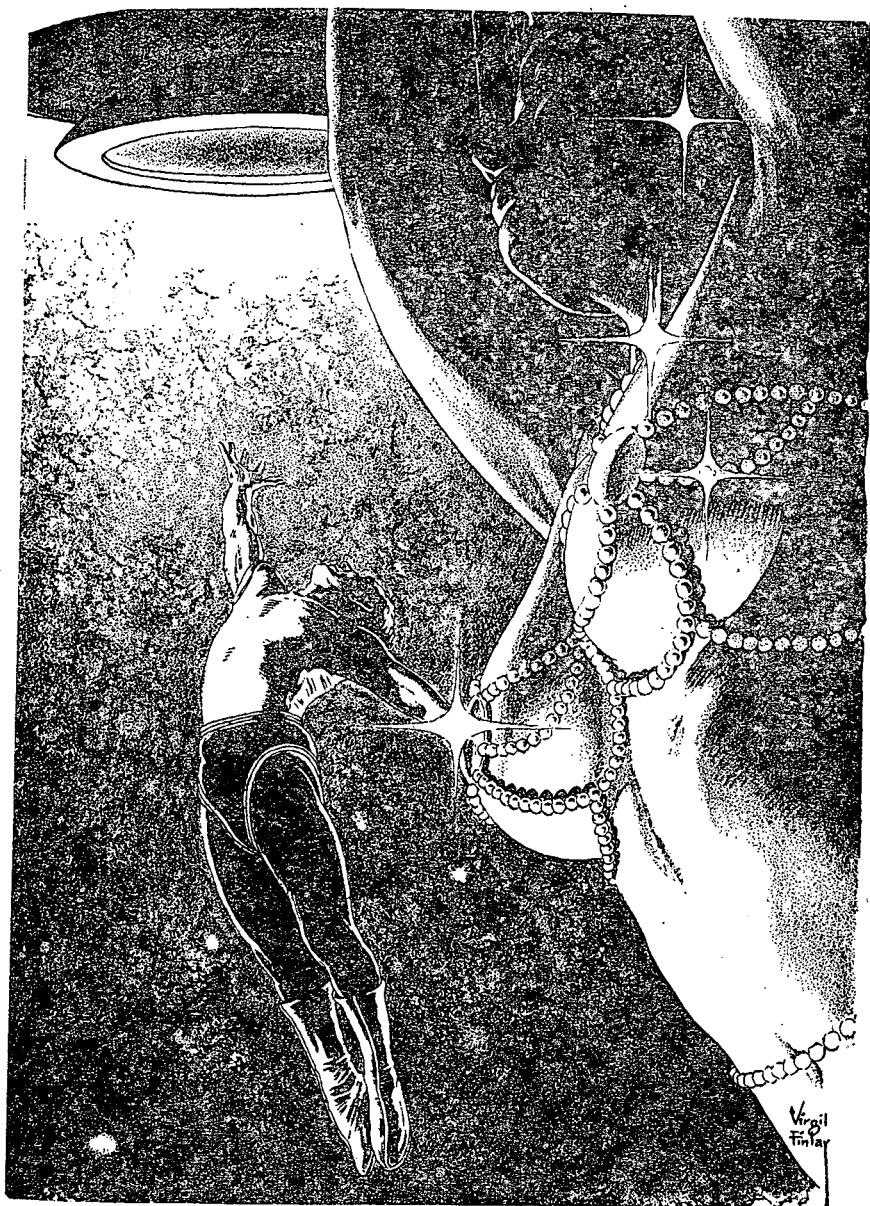
"Well, it won't be exclusively monkey-business, anyway. While we're gone you might clear with the control tower and take us up into take-off position. Come on, Belle." He took her by one elbow and led her away.

"Why, Doctor Garlock." Mincing along beside him, pretending high reluctance, she looked up at him wide-eyed. "I'm surprised, I really am. I'm shocked, too. I'm not that kind of a girl, and if I wasn't afraid of losing my job I would scream. I never even suspected that you would use your position as my boss to force your unwelcome attentions on a poor and young and innocent and suffering . . ."

Inside his room Garlock, who had been grinning, sobered down



In an unparalleled blast
head toward



of Gunther power the primes of many worlds
the meeting on Tellus.

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and checked every Gunther block—a most unusual proceeding.

Belle stopped joking in the middle of the sentence.

"Yeah, *how* you suffer," he said. "I was just checking to be sure we're prime-proof. I'm not ready for Deggi Delcamp yet. That guy, Belle, as you probably noticed, has got one God-awful load of stuff."

"Not as much as you have, Clee. Nor as much push behind what he has got. And his shield wouldn't make patches for yours."

"Huh? How sure are you of that?"

"I'm positive. I'm the one who is going to get bumped, I'm afraid. That Fao Talaho is a hard-hitting, hard-boiled hellcat on wheels."

"I'll be damned. You're wrong. I checked her from stem to gudgeon and you lay over her like a circus tent. What's the answer?"

"Oh? Do I? I'm mighty glad . . . funny, both of us being wrong . . . it must be, Clee, that it's sex-based differences. We're used to each other, but neither of us has ever felt a Prime of the same sex before, and there must be more difference between Ops and Primes than we realized. Suppose?"

"Could be—I hope. But that doesn't change the fact that we aren't ready. We haven't got enough data. If we start out with this grandiose Galactic Service thing and find only two

or three planets Gunthered, we make jackasses of ourselves. On the other hand, if we start out with a small organization or none, and find a lot of planets, it'll be one continuous cat-fight. On the third hand . . ."

"Three hands, Clee? What are you, an octopussy or an Arpa-lone?"

"Keep your beautiful trap shut a minute. On the third hand, we've got to start somewhere. Any ideas?"

"I never thought of it that way . . . Hm-m-m-m . . . I see." She thought for a minute, then went on, "We'll have to start without starting, then . . . quite a trick . . . But how about this? Suppose we take a fast tour, with you and I taking quick peeks, without the peekees ever knowing we've been peeking?"

"That's using the brain, Belle. Let's go." Then, out in the Main, "Jim, we want to hit a few high spots, as far out as you can reach without losing orientation. Beta Centauri here is pretty bright, Rigel and Canopus are real lanterns. With those three as a grid, you could reach fifteen hundred or two thousand light-years, couldn't you?"

"More than that. That many parsecs, at least."

"Good. Belle and I want to make a fast, random-sampling check of Primes and Ops around here. We'll need five minutes at each planet—quite a ways out. So set up as big a globe as you can and still be dead sure of your locations; then sample it."

"Not enough data. How many samples do you want?"

"As many as we can get in the rest of today. Six or seven hours, say—eight hours max."

"Call it seven . . . Brownie on the guns, me on Compy . . . Five minutes for you . . . I should be able to lock down the next shot in five . . . one minute extra, say, for safety factor . . . that'd be ten an hour. Seventy planets enough?"

"That'll be fine."

"Okay. We're practically at Number One now," and James and Lola donned their scanners, ready for the job.

"Miss Flurnoy," Garlock said, "you might tell Mr. Entlore that we're . . ."

"Oh, I already have, sir."

"You don't have to come along, of course, if you'd rather stay here."

"Stay here, sir? Why, he'd *kill* me! I'm off the air for a minute," this last thought was a conspiratorial whisper. "Besides, do you think I'd miss a chance to be the first person—and just a girl, too—of a whole world to see other planets of other suns? Unless, of course, you invite Mr. Entlore and Mr. Holson along. They're both simply dying to go, I know, but of course won't admit it."

"You'd be just as well pleased if I didn't?"

"What do you think, sir?"

"We'll be working at top speed and they'd be very much in the way, so they'll get theirs later—

after you've licked the cream off the top of the . . ."

"Ready to roll, Clee," James announced.

"Roll."

"Why, I lost contact!" Miss Flurnoy exclaimed.

"Naturally," Garlock said. "Did you expect to cover a distance it takes light thousands of years to cross? You can record anything you see in the plates. You can talk to Jim or Lola any time they'll let you. Don't bother Miss Bellamy or me from now on."

Garlock and Belle went to work. All four Galaxians worked all day, with half an hour off for lunch. They visited seventy planets and got back to Margonia in time for a very late dinner. ComOff Flurnoy had less than a quarter of one roll of recorder-tape left unused, and the Primes had enough information to start the project they had in mind.

And shortly after dinner, all five retired.

"In one way, Clee, I'm relieved," Belle pondered, "but I can't figure out why all the Primes—the grown-up ones, I mean—on all the worlds are just about the same cantankerous, you-b-damned, out-and-out stinkers as you and I are. How does *that* fit into your theory?"

"It doesn't. Too fine a detail. My guess is—at least it seems to me to make sense—it's because we haven't had any competition strong enough to smack us down and make Christians

out of us. I don't know what a psychologist would say . . ."

"And I know *exactly* what you'd think of whatever he did say, so you don't need to tell me." Belle laughed and presented her lips to be kissed. "Good night, Clee."

"Good night, ace."

And the next morning, early, Garlock and Belle teleported themselves — by arrangement and appointment, of course—across almost the full width of a nation and into the private office in which Deggi Delcamp and Fao Talaho awaited them.

For a time which would not have been considered polite in Tellurian social circles the four Primes stood still, each couple facing the other with blocks set tight, studying each other with their eyes. Delcamp was, as Garlock had said, a big bruiser. He was shorter and heavier than the Tellurian. Heavily muscled, splendidly proportioned, he was a man of tremendous physical as well as mental strength. His hair, clipped close all over his head, was blonde; his eyes were a clear, keen, cold dark blue.

Fao Talaho was a couple of inches shorter than Belle; and a good fifteen pounds heavier. She was in no sense fat, however, or even plump—actually, she was almost lean. She was wider and thicker than was the Earthwoman; with heavier bones forming a wider and deeper frame. She, too, was beautifully—yes, spectacularly—built.

Her hair, fully as thick as Belle's own and worn in a free-falling bob three or four inches longer than Belle's, was bleached almost white. Her eyes were not really speckled, nor really mottled, but were regularly *patterned* in lighter and darker shades of hazel. She was, Garlock decided, a really remarkable hunk of woman.

Both Nargodians wore sandals without either socks or stockings. Both were dressed—insofar as they were dressed at all—in yellow. Fao's single garment was of a thin, closely-knitted fabric, elastic and sleek. Above the waist it was neckless, backless, and almost frontless; below, it was a very short, very tight and clinging skirt. Delcamp wore a sleeveless jersey and a pair of almost legless shorts.

Garlock lowered his shield enough to send and to receive a thin layer of superficial thought; Delcamp did the same.

"So far, I like what I see," Garlock said then. "We are well ahead of you, hence I can help you a lot if you want me to and if you want to be friendly about it. If you don't, on either count, we leave now. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough. I, too, like what I have seen so far. We need help, and I appreciate your offer. Thanks, immensely. I can promise full cooperation and friendship for myself and for most of our group; and I assure you that I can and will handle any non-cooperation that may come up."

"Nicely put, Deggi." Garlock smiled broadly and let his guard down to a comfortable lepping level. "I was going to bring that up—the faster it's cleared the better. Belle and I are paired. Some day—unless we kill each other first—we may marry. However, I'm no bargain and she's one-third wildcat, one-third vixen, and one-third cobra. How do you two stand?"

"You took the thought right out of my own mind. Your custom of pairing is not what you call 'urbane' on this world. Nevertheless, Fao and I are paired. We had to. No one else has ever interested either of us; no one else ever will. We should not fight, but we do, furiously. But no matter how vigorously we fly apart, we inevitably fly together again just as fast. No one understands it, but you two are pretty much the same."

"Check. Just one more condition, then, and we can pull those women of ours apart." Belle and Fao were still staring at each other, both still sealed tight. "The first time Fao Talaho starts throwing her weight at me, I'm not going to wait for you to take care of her—I'm going to give her the surprise of her life."

"It'd tickle me silly if it could be done," Delcamp smiled and was perfectly frank, "But the man doesn't live that can do it. How would you go about trying it?"

"Set your block solid."

Delcamp did so, and through

that block—the supposedly impenetrable shield of a Prime Operator—Garlock insinuated a probe. He did not crack the screen or break it down by force; he neutralized and counter-phased, painlessly and almost imperceptibly, its every component and layer.

"Like this," Garlock said, in the depths of the Margonian's mind.

"My God! You can do *that*?"

"If I tell her, this deep, to play ball or else, do you think she'd need two treatments?"

"She certainly oughtn't to. This makes you Galactic Admiral, no question. I'd thought, of course, of trying you out for Top Gunther, but this settles that. We will support you, sir, wholeheartedly—and my heartfelt thanks for coming here."

"I have your permission, then, to give Fao a little discipline when she starts rocking the boat?"

"I wish you would, sir. I'm not too easy to get along with, I admit, but I've tried to meet her a lot more than halfway. She's just too damned cocky for *anybody's* good."

"Check. I wish somebody would come along who could knock hell out of Belle." Then, aloud, "Belle, Delcamp and I have the thing going. Do you want in on it?"

Delcamp spoke to Fao, and the two women slowly, reluctantly, lowered their shields to match those of the men.

"Your Galaxian shaking of the hands—handshake, I mean—is very good," Delcamp said, and he and Garlock shook vigorously.

Then the crossed pairs, and lastly the two girls—although neither put much effort into the gesture.

"Snap out of it, Belle!" Garlock sent a tight-beamed thought. "She isn't going to bite you!"

"She's been trying to, damn her, and I'm going to bite her right back—see if I don't."

Garlock called the meeting to order and all four sat down. The Tellurians lighted cigarettes and the others—who, to the Earthlings' surprise, also smoked—asssembled and lit two peculiar-looking things half-way between pipe and cigarette. And both pairs of smokers, after a few tentative tests, agreed in not liking at all the other's taste in tobacco.

"You know, of course, of the trip we took yesterday?" Garlock asked.

"Yes," Delcamp admitted. "We read ComOff Flurnoy. We know of the seventy planets, but nothing of what you found."

"Okay. Of the seventy planets, all have Op fields and all have two or more Operators; one planet has forty-four of them. Only sixty-one of the planets, however, have Primes old enough for us to detect. Each of these worlds has two, and only two, Primes—one male and one fe-

male—and on each world the two Primes are of approximately the same age. On fifteen of these worlds the Primes are not yet adult. On the forty-six remaining worlds, the Primes are young adults, from pretty much like us four down to considerably younger. None of these couples is married-for-family. None of the girls has as yet had a child or is now pregnant.

"Now as to the information circulating all over this planet about us. Part of it is false. Part of it is misleading—to impress the military mind. Thus, the fact is that the *Pleiades*, as far as we know, is the only starship in the whole galaxy. Also, the information is very incomplete, especially as to the all-important fact that we were lost in space for some time before we discovered that the only possible controller of the Gunther Drive is the human mind . . ."

"What!!!!" and argument raged until Garlock stopped it by declaring that he would prove it in the Margonians' own ship.

Then Garlock and Belle together went on to explain and to describe—not even hinting, of course, that they had ever been outside the galaxy or had even thought of trying to do so—their concept of what the Galaxian Societies of the Galaxy would and should do; or what the Galaxian Service could, should, and *would* become—the Service to which they both intended to devote their lives. It wasn't even in existence yet, of

course. Fao and Deggi were the only other Primes they had ever talked to in their lives. That was why they were so eager to help the Margonians get their ship built. The more starships there were at work, the faster the Service would grow into a really tremendous . . .

—“Fao’s getting ready to blow her top,” Delcamp flashed. Garlock a tight-beamed thought. *“If I were doing it I’d have to start right now.”*

“I’ll let her work up a full head of steam, then smack her bow-legged.”

“Cheers, brother! I hope you can handle her!”

. . . organization. Then, when enough ships were working and enough Galaxian Societies were rolling, there would be the Regional organizations and the Galactic Council . . .

“So, on a one-planet basis and right out of your own little fat head,” Fao sneered, “you have set yourself up as Grand High Chief Mogul, and all the rest of us are to crawl up to you on our bellies and kiss your feet?”

“If that’s the way you want to express it, yes. However, I don’t know how long I personally will be in the pilot’s bucket. As I told you, I will enforce the basic tenet that top Gunther is top boss—man, woman, snake, fish, or monster.”

“Top Gunther be damned!” Fao blazed. “I don’t and won’t take orders from *any* man—in hell or in heaven or on this

Earth or on any planet of any . . .”

“Fao!” Delcamp exclaimed, “Please keep still—*please!*”

“Let her rave,” Garlock said, coldly. “This is just a three-year-old baby’s tantrum. If she keeps it up, I’ll give her the damndest jolt she ever got in all her spoiled life.”

Belle whistled sharply to call Fao’s attention, then tight-beamed a thought. “If you’ve got any part of a brain, slick chick, you’d better start using it. The boy friend not only plays rough, but he doesn’t bluff.”

“To hell with all that!” Fao rushed on. “We don’t have anything to do with your organization—go on back home or anywhere else you want to. We’ll finish our own ship and build our own organization and run it to suit ourselves. We’ll . . .”

“That’s enough of that.” Garlock penetrated her shield as easily as he had the man’s, and held her in lock. “You are *not* going to wreck this project. You will start behaving yourself right now or I’ll spread your mind wide open for Belle and Deggi to look at and see exactly what kind of a half-baked jerk you are. If that doesn’t work, I’ll put you into a Gunther-blocked cell aboard the *Pleiades* and keep you there until the ship is finished and we leave Margonia. How do you want it?”

Fao was shocked as she had never been shocked before. At first she tried viciously to fight; but, finding that useless against

the appalling power of the mind holding hers, she stopped struggling and began really to think.

"That's better. You've got what it takes to think with. Go ahead and do it."

And Fao Talaho did have it. Plenty of it. She learned.

"I'll be good," she said, finally. "Honestly. I'm ashamed, really, but after I got started I couldn't stop. But I can now, I'm sure."

"I'm sure you can, too. I know exactly how it is. All us Primes have to get hell knocked out of us before we amount to a whoop in Hades. Deggi got his one way, I got mine another, you got yours this way. No, neither of the others knows anything about this conversation and they won't. This is strictly between you and me."

"I'm awfully glad of that. And I think I . . . yes, damn you, thanks!"

Garlock released her and, after a few sobs, a couple of gulps, and a dabbing at her eyes with an inadequate handkerchief, she said: "I'm sorry, Deggi, and you, too, Belle. I'll try not to act like such a fool any more."

Delcamp and Belle both stared at Garlock; Belle licked her lips.

"No comment," he thought at the man; and, to Belle, "She just took a beating. Will you sheathe your claws and take a lot of pains to be extra nice to her the rest of the day?"

"Why, surely. I'm *always* nice to anybody who is nice to me."

"Says you," Garlock replied, skeptically, and all four went to work as though nothing had happened.

They went through the shops and the almost-finished ship. They studied blueprints. They met all the Operators and discussed generators and fields of force and mathematics and parapsysics and Guntherics. They argued so hotly about mental control that Garlock had James bring the *Pleiades* over to newchristened Galaxian Field so that he could prove his point then and there.

Entlore and Holson came along this time, as well as the ComOff; and all three were nonplussed and surprised to see each member of the "crackpot" group hurl the huge starship from one solar system to any other one desired, apparently merely by thinking about it. And the "crackpots" were extremely surprised to find themselves hopelessly lost in uncharted galactic wildernesses every time they did not think, definitely and positively, of one specific destination. Then Garlock took a chance. He had to take it sometime; he might just as well do it now.

"See if you can hit Andromeda, Deggi," he suggested.

While Belle, James, and Lola held their breaths, Delcamp tried. The starship went toward the huge nebula, but stopped at the last suitable planet on the galaxy's rim.

"Can you hit Andromeda?" Delc& asked, more than half jealously, and Belle tensed her muscles.

"Never tried it," Garlock said, easily. "I suppose, though, since you couldn't kick the old girl out of our good old home galaxy, she'll just sit right here for me, too."

He went through the motions and the *Pleiades* did sit right there—which was exactly what he had told her to do. And everybody—even the "crackpots"—breathed more easily.

And Belle was "nice" to Fao; she didn't use her claws, even once, all day. And, just before quitting time—

"Does he . . . I mean, did he ever . . . well, sort of knock you around?" Fao asked.

"I'll say he hasn't!" Belle's nostrils flared slightly at the mere thought. "I'd stick a knife into him, the big jerk."

"Oh, I didn't mean physically . . ."

"Through my blocks? A Prime's blocks? Don't be ridiculous, Fao!"

"What do you mean, 'ridiculous'? Fao snapped. "You tried my blocks. What did they feel like to you—mosquito netting? What I thought was . . . Oh, all he really said was that all Primes had to have hell knocked out of them before they could be any good. That he had had it one way, Deggi another, and me a third. I see—you haven't had yours yet."

"I certainly haven't. And if he ever tries it, I'll . . ."

"Oh, he won't. He couldn't, very well, because after you're married, it would . . ."

"Did the big lug tell you I was going to marry him?"

"Of course not. No fringes, even. But who else are you going to marry? If the whole universe was clear full of the finest men imaginable—pure dreamboats, no less—can you even conceive of you marrying any one of them except him?"

"I'm not going to marry anybody. Ever."

"No? You, with your Prime's mind and your Prime's body, not have any children? And you tell me not to be ridiculous?"

That stopped Belle cold, but she wouldn't admit it. Instead—"I don't get it. What did he do to you, anyway?"

Fao's block set itself so tight that it took her a full minute to soften it down enough for even the thinnest thought to get through. "That's something nobody will ever know. But anyway, unless . . . unless you find another Prime as strong as Clee is—and I don't really think there are any, do you?"

"Of course there aren't. There's only one of his class, anywhere. He's it," Belle said, with profound conviction.

"That makes it tough for you. You'll have the toughest job imaginable. The very toughest. I know."

"Huh? What job?"

"Since Clee won't do it for

you, and since nobody else can, you'll have to just simply knock hell out of yourself."

And in Garlock's room that night, getting ready for bed, Belle asked suddenly, "Clee, what in hell did you do to Fao Tala-ho?"

"Nothing much. She's a mighty good egg, really."

"Could you do it, whatever it was, to me?"

"I don't know; I never tried it."

"Would you, then, if I asked you to?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Answer that yourself."

"And it was 'nothing much,' it says here in fine print. But I think I know just about what it was. Don't I?"

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"You knocked hell out of yourself, didn't you?"

"I lied to her about that. I'm still trying to."

"So I've got to do it to myself. And I haven't started yet?"

"Check. But you're several years younger than I am, you know."

Belle thought it over for a minute, then stubbed out her cigarette and shrugged her shoulders. "No sale. Put it back on the shelf. I like me better the way I am. That is, I *think* I do . . . In a way, though, I'm sorry, Clee darling."

"Darling? Something new has been added. I wish you really meant that, ace."

"I'm still 'ace' after what I just said? I'm glad, Clee. 'Ace' is ever so much nicer than 'chum.'"

"Ace. The top of the deck. You are, and always will be."

"As for meaning it, I wish I didn't." Ready for bed, Belle was much more completely and much less revealingly dressed than during her working hours. She slid into bed beside him, pulled the covers up to her chin, and turned off the light by glancing at the switch. "If I thought anything could ever come of it, though, I'd do it if I had to pound myself unconscious with a club. But I wouldn't be here, then, either—I'd scoot into my own room so fast my head would spin."

"You wouldn't have to. You wouldn't be here."

"I wouldn't, at that. That's one of the things I like so much about you. But honestly, Clee—seriously, screens-down honestly—can you see any possible future in it?"

"No. Neither of us would give that much. Neither of us can. And there's nothing one-sided about it; I'm no more fit to be a husband than you are to be a wife. And God help our children—they'd certainly need it."

"We'd never have any. I can't picture us living in marriage for nine months without committing at least mayhem. Why, in just the little time we've been paired, how many times have you thrown me out of this very room, with the fervent hope that I'd

drown in deep space before you ever saw me again?"

"At a guess, about the same number of times as you have stormed out under your own power, slamming the door so hard it sprung half the seams of the ship and swearing you'd slice me up into sandwich meat if I ever so much as looked at you again."

"That's what I mean. But how come we got off on *this* subject, I wonder? Because when we aren't fighting, like now, it's purely wonderful. So I'll say it again. Good night, Clee, darling."

"Good night, ace." In the dark his lips sought hers and found them.

The fervor of her kiss was not only much more intense than any he had ever felt before. It was much, very much more intense than Belle Bellamy had either wanted it or intended it to be.

Next morning, at the workman's hour of eight o'clock, the four Tellurians appeared in the office of Margonia's Galaxian Field.

"The first thing to do, Deggi, is to go over in detail your blueprints for the generators and the drive," Garlock said.

"I suppose so. The funny pictures, eh?" Delcamp had learned much, the previous day; his own performance with the *Pleiades* had humbled him markedly.

"By no means, my friend," Garlock said, cheerfully. "While your stuff isn't exactly like ours

—it couldn't be, hardly; the field is so big and so new—that alone is no reason for it not to work. James can tell you. He's the Solar System's top engineer. What do you think, Jim?"

"What I saw in the ship yesterday will work. What few of the prints I saw yesterday will fabricate, and the fabrications will work. The main trouble with this project, it seems to me, is that nobody's building the ship."

"What do you mean by *that* crack?" Fao blazed.

"Just that. You're a bunch of prima donnas; each doing exactly as he pleases. So some of the stuff is getting done three or four times, in three or four different ways, while a lot of it isn't getting done at all."

"Such as?" Delcamp demanded, and—

"Well, if you don't like the way we are doing things you can . . ." Fao began.

"Just a minute, everybody." Lola came in, with a disarming grin. "How much of that is hindsight, Jim? You've built one, you know—and from all accounts, progress wasn't nearly as smooth as your story can be taken to indicate."

"You've got a point there, Lola," Garlock agreed. "We slid back two steps for every three we took forward."

"Well . . . maybe," James admitted.

"So why don't you, Fao and Deggi, put Jim in charge of construction?"

Fao threw back her silvery

head and glared, but Delcamp jumped at the chance. "Would you, Jim?"

"Sure—unless Miss Talaho objects."

"She won't." Delcamp's eyes locked with Fao's, and Fao kept still. "Thanks immensely, Jim. And I know what you mean." He went over to a cabinet of wide, flat drawers and brought back a sheaf of drawings. Not blueprints, but original drawings in pencil. "Such as this. I haven't even got it designed yet, to say nothing of building it."

James began to leaf through the stack of drawings. They were full of erasures, re-drawings, and such notations as "See sheets 17-B, 21-A, and 27-F." Halfway through the pile he paused, turned backward three sheets, and studied for minutes. Then, holding that one sheet by a corner, he went rapidly through the rest of the stack.

"This is it," he said then, pulling the one sheet out and spreading it flat. "What we call Unit Eight—the heart of the drive." Then, tight-beamed to Garlock:

"This is the thing that you designed *in toto* and that I never could understand any part of. All I did was build it. It must generate those Prime fields."

"Probably," Garlock flashed back. "I didn't understand it any too well myself. How does it look?"

"He isn't even close. He's got only half of the constants down, and half of the ones he has got

down are wrong. Look at this mess here . . ."

"I'll take your word for it. I haven't your affinity for blueprints, you know, or your eidetic memory for them."

"Do you want me to give him the whole works?"

"We'll have to, I think. Or the ship might not work at all."

"Could be—but how about inter-galactic hops?"

"He couldn't do it with the *Pleiades*, so he won't be able to with this. Besides, if we change it in any particular he *might*. You see, I don't know very much more about Unit Eight than you do."

"That could be, too." Then, as though just emerging from his concentration on the drawings, James thought at Delcamp and Fao, but on the open, general band.

"A good many errors and a lot of blanks, but in general you're on the right track. I can finish up this drawing in a couple of hours, and we can build the unit in a couple of days. With that in place, the rest of the ship will go fast."

"If Miss Talaho wants me to," he concluded, pointedly.

"Oh, I do, Jim—really I do!" At long last, stiff-backed Fao softened and bent. She seized both his hands. "If you can, it'd be too wonderful for words!"

"Okay. One question. Why are you building your ship so small?"

"Why, it's plenty big enough for two," Delcamp said. "For

four, in a pinch. Why did you make yours so big? Your Main is big enough almost for a convention hall."

"That's what we figured it might have to be, at times," Garlock said. "But that's a very minor point. With yours so nearly ready to flit, no change in size is indicated now. But Belle and I have got to have another conference with the legal eagle. So if you and Brownie, Jim, will 'port whatever you need out of the *Pleiades*, we'll be on our way."

"So long—see you in a few days," he added, and the *Pleiades* vanished; to appear instantaneously high above the stratosphere over what was to become the Galaxian Field of Earth.

"Got a minute, Gene?" he sent a thought.

"For you two Primes, as many as you like. We haven't started building or fencing yet, as you suggested, but we have bought all the real estate. So land the ship anywhere out there and I'll send a jeep out after you."

"Thanks, but no jeep. Nobody but you knows that we've really got control of the *Pleiades*, and I want everybody else to keep on thinking it's strictly for the birds. We'll 'port in to your office whenever you say."

"I say now."

In no time at all the two Primes were seated in the private office of Eugene Evans, Head of the Legal Department of the newly re-incorporated

Galaxian Society of Sol, Inc. Evans was a tall man, slightly thin, slightly stooped, whose thick tri-focals did nothing whatever to hide the keenness of his steel-gray eyes.

"The first thing, Gene," Garlock said, "is this employment contract thing. Have you figured out a way to break it?"

"It can't be broken." The lawyer shook his head.

"Huh? I thought you top-bracket legal eagles could break anything, if you really tried."

"A good many things, yes, especially if they're long and complicated. The Standard Employment Contract, however, is short, explicit, and iron-clad. The employer can discharge the employee for any one of a number of offenses, including insubordination; which, as a matter of fact, the employer himself is allowed to define. On the other hand, the employee cannot quit except for some such fantastic reason as the non-tendering—not non-payment, mind you, but non-tendering—of salary."

"I didn't expect that—it kicks us in the teeth before we get started." Garlock got up, lighted a cigarette, and prowled about the big room. "Okay. Jim and I will have to get ourselves fired, then."

"Fired!" Belle snorted. "Clee, you talk like a man with a paper nose! Who else could run the Project? That is," her whole manner changed; "he doesn't know I can run it as well as you can—or better—but I could tell

him—and maybe you think I wouldn't!"

"You won't have to. Gene, you can start spreading the news that Belle Bellamy is a real, honest-to-God Prime Operator in every respect. That she knows more about Project Gunther than I do and could run it better. Ferber undoubtedly knows that Belle and I have been at loggerheads ever since we first met—spread it thick that we're fighting worse than ever. Which, by the way, is the truth."

"Fighting? Why, you seemed friendly enough . . ."

"Yeah, we can be friendly for about fifteen minutes if we try real hard, as now. The cold fact is, though, that she's just as much three-quarters hell-cat and one-quarter potassium cyanide as she . . ."

"I like *that*!" Belle stormed. She leaped to her feet, her eyes shooting sparks. "All *my* fault! Why, you self-centered, egotistical, domineering jerk, I could write a book . . ."

"That's enough—let it go—*please*!" Evans pleaded. He jumped up, took each of the combatants by a shoulder, sat them down into the chairs they had vacated, and resumed his own seat. "The demonstration was eminently successful. I will spread the word, through several channels. Chancellor Ferber will get it all, rest assured."

"And I'll get the job!" Belle snapped. "And maybe you think I won't take it!"

"Yeah?" came Garlock's sear-

ing thought. "You'd do anything to get it and to keep it. Yeah. I *do* think."

"Oh?" Belle's body stiffened, her face hardened. "I've heard stories, of course, but I couldn't quite . . . but surely, he can't be *that* stupid—to think he can buy me like so many pounds of calf-liver?"

"He surely is. He does. And it works. That is, if he's ever missed, nobody ever heard of it."

"But how could a man in such a big job *possibly* get away with such foul stuff as that?"

"Because all the SSE is interested in is money, and Alonzo P. Ferber is a tremendously able top executive. In the big black-and-red money books he's always 'way, 'way up in the black, and nobody cares about his conduct."

Belle, even though she was already convinced, glanced questioningly at Evans.

"That's it, Miss Bellamy. That's it, in a precise, if somewhat crude, nutshell."

"That's that, then. But just how, Clee—if he's as smart as you say he is—do you think you can make him fire you?"

"I don't know — haven't thought about it yet. But I could be pretty insubordinate if I really tried."

"That's the understatement of the century."

"I'll devote the imponderable force of the intellect to the problem and check with you later. Now, Gene, about the proposed Galactic Service, the Council,

and so on. What is the reaction? Yours, personally, and others?"

"My personal reaction is immensely favorable; I think it the greatest advance that humanity has ever made. I have been very cautious, of course, in discussing, or even mentioning the matter, but the reaction of everyone I have sounded—good men; big men in their respective fields—has been as enthusiastic as my own."

"Good. It won't surprise you, probably, to be told that you are to be this system's councillor and—if we can swing it and I think we can—the first President of the Galactic Council?"

Evans was so surprised that it was almost a minute before he could reply coherently. Then: "I am surprised—very much so. I thought, of course, that you yourself would . . ."

"Far from it!" Garlock said, positively. "I'm not the type. You are. You're better than anyone else of the Galaxians—which means than anyone else period. With the possible exception of Lola, and she fits better on our exploration team. Check, Belle?"

"Check. For once, I agree with you without reservation. *That's* a job we can work at all the rest of our lives, and scarcely start it."

"True—indubitably true. I appreciate your confidence in me, and if the vote so falls I will do whatever I can."

"We know you will, and thank you. How long will it take to organize? A couple of weeks? And

is there anything else we have to cover now?"

"A couple of *weeks!*" Evans was shocked. "You are naive indeed, young man, to think anything of this magnitude can even be started in such a short time as that. And yes, there are dozens of matters—hundreds—that should be discussed before I can even start to work intelligently."

Hence discussions went on and on and on. It was three days before Garlock and Belle ported themselves up into the *Pleiades* and the starship displaced itself instantaneously to Margonia.

Meanwhile, on Margonia, James James James the Ninth went directly to the heart of his job by leading Lola and Fao into Delcamp's office and setting up its Gunther blocks.

"You said you want me to build your starship. Okay, but I want you both—Fao especially—to realize exactly what that means. I know what to do and how to do it. I can handle your Operators and get the job done. However, I can't handle either of you, since you both out-Gunther me, and I'm not going to try to. But there can't be two bosses on any one job, to say nothing of three or seventeen. So either I run the job or I don't. If either of you steps in, I step out and don't come back in. And remember that you're not doing us any favors—it's strictly vice versa."

"Jim!" Lola protested. Fao's hackles were very evidently on

the rise; Delcamp's face was hardening. "Don't be so rough, Jim, *please*. That's no way to . . ."

"If you can pretty this up, pet, I'll be glad to have you say it for me. Here's what you have to work on. If I do the job they'll have their starship in a few weeks. The way they've been going, they won't have it in twenty-five years. And the only way to get that bunch out there to really work is to tell each one of them to cooperate or else—and enforce the 'or else.'"

"But they'd quit!" Delcamp protested. "They'll *all* quit!"

"With suspension or expulsion from the Society the consequences? Hardly." James said.

"But you wouldn't do that—you couldn't."

"I wouldn't?"

"Of course he wouldn't," Lola put in, soothingly, "except as a very last resort. And, even at worst, Jim could build it almost as easily with common labor. You Primes don't really *have* to have any Operators at all, you know; but all your Operators together would be perfectly helpless without at least one Prime."

"How come?" and "In what way?" Delcamp and Fao demanded together.

"Oh, didn't you know? After the ship is built and the fields are charged and so on, everything has to be activated—the hundred and one things that make it so nearly alive—and that is strictly a Prime's job. Even Jim can't do it."

"I see . . . or, rather, I don't see at all," Fao said, thoughtfully. She was no longer either excited or angry. "A few weeks against twenty-five years . . . what do you think of his time estimate, Deg my dear?"

"I hadn't thought it would take nearly that long; but this 'activation' thing scares me. Nothing in my theory even hints at any such thing. So—if there's so much I don't know yet, even in theory, it would take a long time. Maybe I'd never get it."

"Well, anyway, I want our *Celestial Queen* done in weeks, not years," Fao said, extending her hand to James and shaking his vigorously. "So I promise not to interfere a bit. If I feel any such urge coming on, I'll dash home and lock myself up in a closet until it dies. Fair enough?"

Since Fao really meant it, that was fair enough.

For a whole day James did nothing except study blueprints; going over in detail and practically memorizing every drawing that had been made. He then went over the ship, studying minutely every part, plate, member, machine and instrument that had been installed. He noted what each man and woman was doing and what they intended to do. He went over material on hand and material on order, paying particular attention to times of delivery. He then sent a few—surprisingly few—telegrams.

Finally he called all fourteen Operators together. He told them exactly what the revised situation was and exactly what he was going to do about it. He invited comments.

There was of course a riot of protest; but—in view of what James had said anent suspensions and expulsions from the Galaxian Society—not one of them actually did quit. Four of them, however, did appeal to Delcamp, considerably to his surprise, to oust the interloper and to put things back where they had been; but they did not get much satisfaction.

"James says that he can finish building this starship in a few weeks," Delcamp told them, flatly. "Specifically, three weeks, if we can get the special stuff made fast enough. Fao and I believe him. Therefore, we have put him in full charge. He will remain in charge unless and until he fails in performance. You are all good friends of Fao's and mine, and we hope that all of you will stay with the project. If, however, we must choose now between you—any one of you or all of you—and James, there is no need to tell you what the choice will be."

Wherefore all fourteen went back to work; grudgingly at first and dragging their feet. In a very few hours, however, it became evident to all that James did in fact know what he was doing and that the work was going faster and smoother than ever before; whereupon all op-

position and all malingering disappeared. They were Operators, and they were all intensely interested in their ship. Morale was at a high.

Thus, when the *Pleiades* landed beside the now seething *Celestial Queen*, Garlock found James with feet on desk, hands in pockets, and scanner on head; doing—apparently—nothing at all. Nevertheless, he was a very busy man.

"Hey, Jim!" A soprano shriek of thought emanated from a gorgeous seventeen-year-old blonde. "I can't read this funny-picture, it's been folded too many times. Where does this lead go to?"

"Data insufficient. Careful, Vingie; I'd hate to have to send you back to school."

"Scuse, please, Junior. Unit Six, Sub-Assembly Tee Dash Niyun. Terminal Fo-wer. From said terminal, there's a lead—Bee Sub something-or-other—goes somewhere. Where?"

"B sub Four. It goes to Unit Seven, Sub-Assembly Q dash Three, Terminal Two. And watch your insulation—that's a mighty hot lead."

"Uh-huh, I got that. Double Sink Mill Mill; Class Albert Dog Kittens. Thanks, boss!"

"Hi, Jim," Garlock said. Then, to Delcamp. "I see you're rolling."

"He's rolling, you mean." Delcamp had not yet recovered fully from a state of near-shock. "So that's what an eidetic memory

is? He knows every nut, bolt, lead, and coil in the ship!"

"More than that. He's checking every move everybody makes. When they're done, you won't have to just hope everything was put together right—you'll *know* it was."

Jim was their man.

And Fao sidled over toward Belle. There was something new about the silver-haired girl, Belle decided instantly. The difference was slight—Belle couldn't put her finger on it at first. She seemed—quieter? Softer? More subdued? No, definitely. More feminine? No; that would be impossible. More . . . more adult? Belle hated to admit it, even to herself, but that was what it was.

"Deg and I got married day before yesterday," Fao confided, via tight beam.

"Oh—so you're *pregnant!*"

"Of course. I saw to that the first thing. I knew you'd want to be the first one to know. Oh, isn't it *wonderful?*" She seized Belle's arm and hugged it ecstatically against her side. "Just too perfectly marvelous for *anything?*"

"Oh, I'm sure it is; and I'm so happy for you, Fao!" And it would have taken the mind of a Garlock to perceive anything either false or forced in thought or bearing.

Nevertheless, when Belle went into Garlock's room that night, storm signals were flying high in her almost-topaz eyes.

"Fao Talaho-Delcamp is *preg-*

nant!" she stormed, "and it's all *your* fault!"

"Uh-huh," he demurred, trying to snap her out of her obviously savage mood. "Not me, ace. Not a chance in the world. It was Deggi."

"You . . . you *weasel!* You know very well, Clee Garlock, what I meant. If you hadn't given her that treatment she'd have kept on fighting with him and they wouldn't have been married and had any children for positively *years*. So now she'll have the first double-Prime baby and it ought to be *mine*. I'm older than she is—our group is 'way ahead of theirs—we have the first and *only* starship—and then you do *that*. And you wouldn't give *me* that treatment. Oh, no—just to *her*, that bleached-blondie! I'd like to strangle you to death with my own bare hands!"

"What a hell of a logic!" Garlock had been trying to keep his own temper in leash, but the leash was slipping. "Assume I tried to work on you—assume I succeeded—what would you be? What would I have? What age do you think this is—that of the Vikings? When SOP in getting a wife was to beat her unconscious with a club and drag her into the longboat by her hair? Hardly! I do not want and will not have a conquered woman. Nor a spoiled-rotten, mentally-retarded brat . . ."

"You unbearable, conceited, overbearing jerk! Why, I'd rather . . ."

"Get out! And *this* time, *stay* out!"

Belle got out—and if door and frame had not been built of super-steel, both would have been wrecked by the blast of energy she loosed in closing the door behind her.

In her own room, with Gunther blocks full on, she threw herself face down on the bed and cried as she had not cried since she was a child.

And finally, without even taking off her clothes, she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER 8

NEXT morning, early, Belle tapped lightly on Garlock's door.

"Come in."

She did so. "Have you had your coffee?"

"Yes."

"So have I."

Neither Belle nor Garlock had recovered; both faces showed strain and drain.

"I think we'd better break this up," Belle said, quietly.

"Check. We'll have to, if we expect to get any work done."

Belle could not conceal her surprise.

"Oh, not for the reason you think," Garlock went on, quickly. "Your record as a man-killer is still one hundred point zero zero zero percent. I've been in love with you ever since we paired. Before that, even."

"Flapdoodle!" she snorted, inelegantly. "Why, I . . ."

"Keep still a minute. And I'm not going to fight with you again. Ever. I'm not going to touch you again until I can control myself a lot better than I could last night."

"Oh? That was mostly my fault, of course. But in love? Uh-uh, I've seen men in love. You aren't. I couldn't make you be, not with the best I could do. Not even in bed. You aren't, Clee—if you are, I'm an Australian bushman."

"Perhaps I'm an atypical case. I'm not raving about your perfect body—you know what that is like already. Nor about your mind, which is the only one I know of as good as my own. Maybe I'm in love with what I think you ought to be . . . or what I hope you will be. Anyway, I'm in love with *something* connected with you—and with no other woman alive. Shall we go eat?"

"Uh-huh—let's."

They joined Lola and James at the table; and if Lola noticed anything out of the ordinary, she made no sign.

And after breakfast, in the Main—

"About three weeks, Jim, you think?" Garlock asked.

"Give or take a couple of days, yes."

"And Belle and I would just be in the way—at least until time to show Deggi about the activation . . . and all those Primes to organize . . . we'd better leave you here, don't you think, and get going?"

"I'll buy that. We'll finish as soon as possible."

Lola and James moved a few personal belongings plantside; Garlock and Belle shot the *Pleides* across a vast gulf of space to one of the planets they had scanned so fleetingly on their preliminary survey. Its name was, both remembered, Lizoria; its two Primes were named Rezdo Semolo and Mirea Mitala—male and female, respectively.

After sending down a very brief and perfunctory request for audience—which was in effect a declaration of intent and nothing else—Garlock and Belle teleported themselves down into Semolo's office, where both Lizorian Primes were.

Both got up out of peculiar-looking chairs to face their visitors. Both were tall; both were peculiarly thin. Not the thinness of emaciation, but that of bodily structure.

"On them it looks good," Belle tight-beamed a thought to Garlock.

Both moved fast and with exquisite control; both were extraordinarily graceful. "Snaky" was Belle's thought of the woman; "sinuous" was Garlock's of the man. Both were completely hairless, of body and of head—not by nature, but via electric-shaver clipping. Both wore sandals. The man wore shorts and a shirt-like garment of nylon or its like; the woman wore just enough ribbons and bands to hold a hundred thousand credits' worth of jewels in place. She ap-

peared to be about twenty years—Tellurian equivalent—old; he was probably twenty-three or twenty-four.

"We did not invite you in and we do not want you here," Semolo said, coldly. "So get out, both of you. If you don't, when I count three I'll throw you out, and I won't be too careful about how many of your bones I break. One . . . Two . . ."

"Pipe down, Rezdo!" the girl exclaimed. "They have something we haven't, or they wouldn't be here. Whatever it is, we want it."

"Oh, let him try, Miss Mitala," Garlock said, through her hard-held block, in the depth of her mind. "He won't hurt us a bit and it may do him some good. While he's wasting effort I'll compare notes with my partner here, Galactic Vice-Admiral Belle Bellamy. I'm glad to see that one of you has at least a part of a brain."

". . . Three!" Semolo did his best, with everything he had, without even attracting Garlock's attention. He then tried to leap at the intruder physically, despite the latter's tremendous advantage in weight and muscle, but found that he could not move.

Then, through Belle's solidly-set blocks, "How are you doing, ace? Getting anywhere?"

"My God!" came Belle's mental shriek. "What—how can—but no, you *didn't* give *that* to Fao, surely!"

"I'll say I didn't—nor to Del-

camp. But you're going to need it, I'm thinking."

"But *can* you? Even if you *would*—and I'm just beginning to realize how big a man you really are—can that kind of stuff be taught? I probably haven't got the brain-cells it takes to handle it."

"I'm not sure, but I've reworked our Prime Fields into one and made a couple of other changes. Theoretically, it ought to work. Shall I come in and try it?"

"Don't be an idiot, darling. *Of course!*"

As impersonally as a surgeon exploring an organ, Garlock went into Belle's mind. "Tune to the field . . . that's it—fine! Then—I'll do it real slow, and watch me close—you do like so . . . get it?"

"Uh-huh!" Belle breathed, excitedly. "Got it!"

"Then this . . . and this . . . and there you are. You can try it on me, if you like."

"Uh-uh. No sale. I don't need practice and I'd like to preserve the beautiful illusion that maybe I *could* crack your shield if I wanted to. I'll work on Miss Snake-Hips here, the serpentine charmer—but say, I'll bet there's a bone in it. *You* can block it, can't you?"

"Yes. It goes like this." He showed her. "It takes full mastery of the Prime Field, but you've got that."

"Oh, wonderful! Thanks, Clee darling. But do you mean to actually say I can now completely

block you or any other Prime out?"

"You're going too far, ace. Me, yes—but don't forget that there very well may be people—or things—as far ahead of us as we are ahead of pointer pups."

"Huh! Balloon-juice and prop-wash! I just *know*, Clee, that you're the absolute tops of the whole, entire, macrocosmic universe."

"Well, we can dream, of course." Garlock withdrew his mind from Belle's and turned his attention to the now quiet Semolo. "Well, my over-confident and contumacious young squirt; are you done horsing around or do you want to keep it up until you addle completely what few brains you have?"

The Lizorian made no reply; but merely glared.

"The trouble with you half-baked, juvenile—I almost added 'delinquent' to that, and perhaps I should have—Primes is that you know too damned much that isn't true. As an old Tellurian saying hath it, 'you're altogether too big for your britches.'"

"Thus, simply because you have lived a few years on one single planet and haven't encountered anyone able to stand up to you, you've sold yourself on the idea that there's nobody, anywhere, who can. You're wrong—you couldn't be more so if you had an army to help you."

"What, actually, have you done? What, actually, have you got? Practically nothing. You haven't even started a starship;

you've scarcely started making plans. You realize dimly that the theory is not in any of the books, that you'll have to slug it out for yourself, but that is *work*. So you're still just posing and throwing your weight around.

"As a matter of fact, you're merely a drop in a lake. There are thousands of millions of planets, and thousands of millions of Prime Operators. Most of them are probably a lot stronger than you are; many of them may be stronger than my partner and I are. I am not at all certain that you will pass even the first screening; but since you are without question a Prime Operator, I will deliver the message we came to deliver. Miss Mitala, do you want to listen or shall we drive it into you, too?"

"I want to listen to anyone or anything who has a working starship and who can do what you have just done."

"Very well," and Garlock told the general-distribution version of the story of the Galactic Service.

"Quite interesting," Semolo said loftily, at its end. "Whether or not I would be interested depends, of course, on whether there's a position high enough for . . ."

"I doubt very much if there's one low enough," Garlock cut in sharply. "However, since it's part of my job, I'll get in touch with you later. Okay, Belle."

And in the Main—"What a jerk!" Belle exclaimed. "What a

half-cooked, half-digested *pill*! I simply marvel at your forbearance, Clee. You should have turned him inside out and hung him up to dry—especially behind the ears!" Then, suddenly, she giggled. "But do you know what I did?"

"I can guess. A couple of shots in the arm?"

"Uh-huh. Next time he pitches into her she'll slap his ears right off. Oh, *brother*!"

"Check and double-check. But let's hop to Number Two . . . Here it is."

"Oh, yes," came a smooth, clear, diamond-sharp thought in reply to Garlock's introductory call. "This world, as you have perceived, is Falne. I am indeed Baver 14WD27, my companion Prime is indeed Glarre 12WD91. You are, we perceive, Bearers of the Truth; of great skill and of high advancement. Your visit here will, I am sure, be of immense benefit to us and possibly, I hope, of some small benefit to you. We will both be delighted to have you both 'port yourselves to us at once."

The Tellurians did so—and in the very instant of appearance Garlock was met by a blast of force the like of which he had never even imagined. The two Falnian Primes, capable operators both, had built up their highest possible potentials and had launched both terrific bolts without any hint of warning.

Belle's mind, however, was already fused with Garlock's.

Their combined blocks were instantaneous in action; their counter-thrust was nearly so. Both Falnians staggered backward until they were stopped by the room's wall.

"Ah, yes," Garlock said, then. "You are indeed, in a small and feeble way, Seekers after the Truth; of which we are indeed Bearers. Lesser Bearers, perhaps, but still Bearers. You will indeed profit greatly from our visit. You err, however, in thinking that we may in any respect profit from you. You have nothing whatever that we have not had for long. Now let us, if you please, take a few seconds of time to get acquainted, each with the other."

"That, indeed, is the logical and seemly thing to do." Both Falnians straightened up and stepped forward; neither arrogantly nor apologetically, but simply as though nothing at all out of the ordinary had taken place.

Each pair studied the other. Physically, the two pairs were surprisingly alike. Baver was almost as big as Garlock; almost as heavily muscled. Glarre could have been cast in Belle's own mold.

With that, however, all resemblance ceased.

Both Falnians were naked. The man wore only a belt and pouch in lieu of pockets; the woman only a leather carryall slung from one shoulder—big enough, Garlock thought, to

hold a week's supplies for an Explorer Scout.

His hair was thick, bushy, unkempt; sun-bleached to a nondescript blend of pale colors. Hers—long, heavy, meticulously middle-parted and dressed—was a startling two-tone job. To the right of the part it was a searingly brilliant red; to the left, an equally brilliant royal blue.

His skin was deeply tanned. The color of hers was completely masked by a bizarrely spectacular overlay of designs done in semi-indelible, multi-colored dyes.

"Ah, you are worthy indeed of receiving an increment of Truth. Hear, then, the message we bring," and again Garlock told the story.

"We thank you, sir and madam, from our hearts. We will accept with joy your help in finishing our ship; we will do all that in us lies to further the cause of the Galactic Service. Until a day, then?"

"Until a day." Then, to Belle, "Okay, ace. Ready? Go!"

And up in the Main—"Sweet Sin!" Belle exclaimed. "What a pair *they* turned out to be! Clee, that simply scared me witless."

"You can play that in spades." Garlock jammed his hands into his pockets and prowled about the room, his face a black scowl of concentration.

Until, finally, he pulled himself out of the brown study and said: "I've been trying to think if there's any other thing, however slight, that I have and you

haven't. There isn't. You've got it all. You're just as fast as I am, just as sharp and as accurate—and, since we now draw on the same field, just as strong."

"Why Clee! You're worrying about *me*? You've done altogether too much for me, already."

"Anything I can do, I've got to do . . . well, shall we go?"

"We shall."

They visited four more planets that day. And after supper that night, standing in the corridor between their doors, Belle began to soften her shield, as though to send a thought. Almost instantly, however, she changed her mind and snapped it back to full on.

"Good night, Clee," she said.

"Good night, Belle," and each went into his own room.

The next day they worked nine planets, and the day after that they worked ten. They ate supper in friendly fashion; then strolled together across the Main, to a davenport.

"It's funny," Belle said thoughtfully, "having this tremendous ship all to ourselves. To have a private conference right out here in the Main . . . or is it?"

He triggered the shields, she watched him do it. "It is now," he assured her.

"Prime-proof? Not ordinary Gunther blocks?"

"Uh-huh. Two hundred kilovolts and four hundred kilo-

gunts. Backed by all the force of the Prime and Op fields and the full power of the engines. I told you I'd made some changes in the set-up."

"Private enough, I guess . . . what a mess those Primes are! And we'll have to make the rounds twice more—when we alert 'em and when we pick 'em up."

"Not necessarily. This new set-up ought to give us a galaxy-wide reach. Let's try Semolo, on Lizzoria, shall we?"

"Uh-huh— Let's."

"Tune in, then ace."

"Ace, darling?"

"Ace, *Darling*?"

"Darling. You said you weren't going to fight with me any more. Okay—I'm not going to try any more to lick you until after I've licked myself. I'm tuned—you may fire when ready, Gridley."

They fired—and hit the mark dead center. Top-lofty and arrogant and belligerent as ever, the Lizzorian Prime took the call. "I thought all the time you wanted something. Well, I neither want nor need . . ."

"Cut it, you unlicked cub, until you can begin to use that half-liter of golop you call a brain," Garlock said, harshly. "We're just trying out a new ultra-communicator. Thanks for your help."

On the fourth day they worked eleven planets; the fifth day saw the forty-sixth planet done and the immediate job finished. All during supper it was very

evident that Belle had something on her mind.

After eating, she went out into the Main and slumped down on a davenport. Garlock followed her. A cigarette leaped out of a closed box and into place between her lips. It came alight. She smoked it slowly, without relish; almost as though she did know that she was smoking.

"Might as well get it out of your system, Belle," Garlock said aloud. "What are you thinking about at the moment?"

Belle exhaled; the half-smoked butt vanished. "At the moment I was thinking about Gunther blocks. Specifically, their total inability to cope with that new Prime probe of yours." She stared at him, narrow-eyed. "It goes through them just like nothing at all." She paused; eyed him questioningly.

"No comment."

"And yet you gave it to me. Freely, of your own accord. Even before I needed it. Why?"

"Still no comment."

"You'd better comment, Buster, before I blow my top."

"There is such a thing as urbanity."

"I've heard of it, yes; even though you never did believe I ever had any. You *talk* a good game of urbanity, but your brand of it would never carry you *that* far . . ."

She paused. He remained silent. She went on.

"Of course, it does put a lot of pressure on me to develop myself."

"I'm glad you used the word 'develop' instead of 'treat.'"

"Oh, sometimes—at rare intervals—I'm not exactly dumb. But you knew—you *must* have known—what a horrible risk you took in making me as tremendously powerful as you are."

"Some, perhaps, but very definitely less risky than not doing it."

"Getting information out of you is harder than pulling teeth. Clee Garlock, I want you to tell me *why*!"

"Very well." Garlock's jaw set. "You've had it in mind all along that this is some kind of a lark; that you and I are Gunther Tops of the universe. Or did that belief weaken a bit when we met Bayer 14WD27?"

"Well, perhaps—a little. However, the probability is becoming greater with every planet we visit. After all, *some* race has to be tops. Why *shouldn't* it be us?"

"*What* a logic—excuse me, skip it . . ."

"Oh, you really *meant* it when you said you weren't going to fight with me any more?"

"I'm going to try not to. Now, remembering that I don't consider your premise valid, just suppose that when we visit some planet some day, you get your mind burned out and I don't—solely because I had something I could have given you and wouldn't. What then?"

"Oh. I thought that was what you . . . but suppose I can't . . ."

"We won't suppose anything

of the kind. But that wasn't all that was on your mind. Nor most."

"How true. Those Primes. The women. Honestly, Clee, I never saw—never imagined—such a bunch of exhibitionistic, obstreperous, obnoxious, swell-headed, hussies in my whole life. And every day it was borne in on me more and more that I was—am—exactly like the rest of them."

Garlock was wise enough to say nothing, and Belle went on: "I've been talking a good game of licking myself, but this time I'm going to *do* it."

She jumped up and doubled her fists. "If you can do it, I can," she declared. "Like the ancient ballad—'Anything you can do I can do better.'" She tried to be jaunty, but the jauntiness did not ring quite true.

"That's an unfortunate quotation, I'm afraid. The trouble is, I haven't."

"Huh? Don't be an idiot, Clee. You certainly have—what else do *you* suppose put me so far down into the dumps?"

"In that case, you *certainly* will. So come on up out of the dumps."

"Wilco—and I certainly will. But for a woman who has been talking so big, I feel low in my mind. A good-night kiss, Clee, darling? Just one—and just a little one, at that?"

"Sweetheart!"

There were more than one, and none of them was little. Eventually, however, the two stood,

arms still around each other, in the corridor between their doors.

"But kissing's as far as it goes, isn't it," Belle said. The remark was not a question; nor was it quite a statement.

"That's right."

"So good night, darling."

"Good night, ace."

And when they next saw each other, at the breakfast table, Belle was apparently her usual dauntless self.

"Hi, darling—sit down," she said, gaily. "Your breakfast is on the table. Bacon, eggs, toast, strawberry jam, and a liter of coffee."

"Nice! Thanks, ace."

They ate in silence for a few minutes; then her hand crept tentatively across the table. He pressed it warmly. "You look a million, Belle. Out of the dumps?"

"Pretty much—in most ways. One way, though, I'm in deeper than ever. You see, I know exactly what you did to Fao Tala-ho; and why neither you or anybody else could do it to me. Or if they could, what would happen if they did."

"I was hoping you would. I couldn't very well tell you, before, but . . ."

"Of course not. I see that."

". . . the fact is that Fao, and all the others we've met, are young enough, unformed enough—plastic enough—yes, damn it, *weak* enough—to bend. But you are tremendously strong, and twelve Rockwell numbers harder

than a diamond. You wouldn't bend. If enough stress could be applied—and that's decidedly questionable—you wouldn't bend. You'd break, and I can't figure it. You're a little older, of course, but not enough to . . ."

"How about the fact that I've been banging myself for eight years against Cleander Garlock, the top Prime of the universe and the hardest? That might have something to do with it, don't you think?"

Garlock said, "Indefensible conclusions drawn from insufficient data. That's just what I've been talking about. No matter how we got the way we are, though, the fact is that you and I have got to fight our own battles and bury our own dead."

"Check. Like having a baby, but worse. There's nothing anybody else can do—even you—except maybe hold my hand, like now."

"That's about it. But speaking of holding hands, would it help if we paired again?"

Belle studied the question for two full minutes; her fine eyes clouded. "No," she said, finally. "I would enjoy it too much, and you'd . . . well, you wouldn't . . ."

"Huh?" he demanded.

"Oh, physically, of course; but that isn't enough, or good enough, now. You see, I know what your personal code is. It's unbelievable, almost—I never heard of one like it, except maybe a priest or two—but I admire you tremendously for it. You would never, willingly, pair with

a woman you really loved. That was why you were so glad to break ours off. You can't deny it."

"I won't try to deny it. But you can't bluff me, Belle, so please quit trying. Basically, your code is the same as mine. Why else did you initiate our break?"

Belle's block went solid, and Garlock said hastily, aloud, "Excuse it, please. Cancel. I've just said, and know as an empirical fact, that you've got to do the job alone—but I can't seem to help putting my big, flat foot in it by blundering in anyway. Let's get to work, shall we?"

"What at? Interview the Primes, I'd say—tell them to hold themselves in readiness to attend . . ."

"On very short notice . . ."

"Yes. To attend the big meeting on Tellus. We'll have to make a schedule. It shouldn't be held until after Fao and Deggi get their ship built—it *can't* be held, of course, until after you and Jim are out of SSE. Have you got *that* figured out yet?"

"Pretty much." He told her his plan.

Belle giggled, then burst into laughter. "So *I'm* in it, too? Wonderful!"

"You have to be. If we make him mad enough, he'll fire you, too."

"Without hiring me first? He couldn't."

"He could, very easily. He doesn't know one-tenth of one percent of his people. If we work

it right he'll assume that you're one of us wage-slaves, too. Lola, too, for that matter."

"Careful, Clee. You and I think this is funny, but Lola wouldn't. She'd be shocked to her sweet little core, and she'd louse up the whole deal. So be very sure she doesn't get in on it."

"I guess you're right . . . well, shall we go out and insult our touchy young friend Semolo? Ready . . . Go!"

"Oh, it's *you* again. I tell you . . ." the Lizzorian began.

"You will tell me nothing. You will listen. Link your mind to Mitala's," and the linked Tellurian minds enforced the order. "In about two weeks the Primes of many worlds will meet in person on Tellus. Arrange your affairs so that on ten minutes' notice you both can leave Lizzoria for Tellus aboard our starship, the *Pleiades*. That is all."

"He'll come, too," Belle chorled. "He'll writhe and scream, but he'll come."

"You couldn't keep him away," Garlock agreed.

On the next planet, Falne, the procedure was a little different. The information was the same, but— "One word of warning," Garlock added. "It is to be a meeting of minds; not a contest to set up a pecking-order. If you try any such business you will be disciplined; sharply and in public."

"Suppose that, under such conditions, we refuse to attend the meeting?"

"That is your right. There is no coercion whatever. Whether or not you come will depend upon whether or not you two are in reality Seekers after Truth. Until a day."

And so it went. Planet after planet. On not one of those worlds had any Prime changed his thinking. Not one was really interested in the Galactic Service as an instrument for the good of all mankind. There were almost as many attitudes as there were Primes; but all were essentially self-centered and selfish.

"That tears it, Belle—busts it wide open. I can—I mean we together can do either job. That is, either be top boss and run the thing or put in full time beating some sense into those hard skulls. We can't do both."

"On paper, we should," Belle said, thoughtfully. "You're Galactic Admiral; I'm your Vice. One job apiece. But we're *not* going to be separated. Besides . . ."

"Two (minds) (brains) are much better than one," both said, except for one word, in unison.

Belle laughed. "That settles that. The Garlock-Bellamy fusion is Galactic Admiral—so we need a good Vice. Who? Deggi and Fao? They're cooperative and idealistic enough, but . . . Oh, I don't know exactly what it is they lack. Do you?"

"No; I can't put it into words or thoughts. Probably the concept is too new for pigeon-holing. It isn't exactly strength or hard-

ness or toughness or resilience or brisance—maybe a combination of all five. What we need is a pair like us but better.”

“There *aren't* any.”

“Don't be too sure.” Belle glanced at him in surprise and he went on: “Not that we've seen, no. But each of those worlds centers a volume of space containing thousands of planets. Including the Tellurian and the Margonian, we now have forty-eight regions defined. Let's run a very fast search-pattern of Region Forty-nine and see what we come up with.”

“All right . . . but suppose we do find somebody who out-Gunthers us?”

“I'd a lot rather have it that way than the way it is now. I'll do the hopping, you the checking. Here's the first one—what do you read?”

“N. G.”

“And this one?”

“The same.”

“And this?”

“Ditto.”

Until, finally: “Clee, just how long are you going to keep this up?”

“Until we find something or run out of time for the meeting. Belle, I really *want* to find somebody who amounts to something.”

“So do I, really, so go ahead.”

But they did not run out of time. At planet number four-hundred-something, Belle suddenly emitted a shriek—vocally as well as mentally. “Clee! Hold

it! Here's something, I think!”

“I'm sure there is, and I'm gladder to see you two people than can possibly be expressed.”

Belle whirled; so did Garlock. A man stood in the middle of the Main; a man shaped very much like Garlock, but with long, badly-tousled hair and a bushy wilderness of fiery-red whiskers.

“Please excuse this intrusion, Admiral—or should it be plural? Improper address, I'm sure, but your joint tenure is a concept so new and so vast that I am not yet able to grasp it fully—but you are working at such high speed that I had to do something drastic. You will, I trust, remain here long enough to discuss certain matters with my wife and me?”

“We'll be very glad to.”

“Thank you. I will return, then, more decorously, and bring her. One moment.” He disappeared.

“*Wife!*” Belle exclaimed, more than half in dismay. “They must be, then . . .”

“Yeah.” The thought of a wife did not bother Garlock at all. “Talk about *power!* And *speed!* To get all that stuff and 'port up here in the millisecond or so we had the screens open? Baby Doll, there's a guy who is what a Prime Operator *ought* to be!”

In less than a minute the man reappeared, accompanied by a woman who was very obviously pregnant—eight months or so. Like the man, she was dressed in tight-fitting coveralls. Her hair, however—it was a natural

red, too—was cut to a uniform length of eight inches, and each hair individually stood out, perfectly straight and perfectly perpendicular to the element of the scalp from which it sprang.

"Friends Belle and Clee of Tellus, I present Therea, my wife; and Alysne, myself; of this planet Thaker. We have numbers, too, but they are never used among friends."

Acknowledgments were made and a few minutes of conversation ensued, during which the two couples studied each other.

"This looks mighty good to me," Garlock said then. "Shall we go screens half-down, Alysne, and cry in each other's beer?"

In thirty seconds of flashing communication each became thoroughly informed. Those minds could send, and could receive, an incredibly vast amount of information in an incredibly brief space of time.

"Your ship should work and doesn't," Garlock said. "Show me; in detail."

Alysne showed him.

"Oh, I see. You didn't work out quite all the theory. It has to be activated. Like this . . ." Garlock showed Alysne.

"I see. Thanks." Alysne disappeared and was gone for some ten minutes. He reappeared, grinning hugely behind his flaming wilderness of beard. "It works perfectly; for which our heartfelt thanks. And now that my mind is at complete peace with the universe, we will con-

sider the utterly fascinating subject of your proposed Galactic Service. You two Tellurians, immature although you are, have made two tremendous contributions to the advancement of the Scheme of Things—three, if you count the starship, which is comparatively unimportant—each of such import that no human mind can foresee any fraction of its consequences. First, your Prime Field, the probe and its screen . . ."

"Clee!" Belle drove the thought. "You *didn't* give him *that*, surely!"

"Tut-tut, my child," Therea soothed her. "You are alarming yourself about nothing."

"The only trouble with you two youngsters is that you aren't quite—very nearly, of course, but very definitely not quite—grown up." Alysne smiled again; not only with mouth and eyes, but with his whole hairy face. "To the mature mind there is no such thing as status. Each knows what he can do best and does it as a matter of course. Rank is not necessary."

"Second, the unimaginably important contribution of the ability to combine two dissimilar but intimately compatible minds into one tremendously effective fusion. While Therea and I have had only a few moments to play with it, we realize some of its possibilities. Thus, since she is a Doctor of Humanities . . ."

"Oh," Belle interrupted. "That's why you knew what I was thinking about, even though

I tight-beamed the thought and my screens were tight?"

"Exactly so. But to continue. With her sympathy and empathy, and my driving force and so on, the job of licking these young Primes into shape is, as your idiom has it, 'strictly our dish.' It is a truly delicious thought.

"You two, on the other hand, have much that we lack. Breadth and depth and scope of imagination and of vision; yet almost incredible will-power and stamina and resolve . . ."

"*That's the word I was trying to think of—will-power,*" Belle flashed a thought at Garlock.

"... qualities virtually always mutually exclusive; but the combination of which makes your fusion uniquely qualified to lead and direct this new and magnificent movement. But Therea and I have been idle and frustrated far too long. We can be of most use, at the moment, on Margonia; working with the Fao-Deggi unit. Therefore, with renewed deep thanks, we go."

Man and wife disappeared; and, ten seconds later, the Thakern starship vanished from its world.

"Well, *what* do you think of *that*?" Belle gasped. "I was actually afraid to think, even behind a Prime screen. I don't know *yet* whether I want to kiss 'em or kill 'em."

"I do. That guy is really a Prime, Belle. He's older, bigger, and a lot better than I am."

"Uh-uh," she demurred, posi-

tively. "Older, yes. More mature—you *baby*, you!" She snickered gleefully. "If he hadn't included you in that crack I'd've stabbed him, so help me, even though it wasn't true. He said himself it's *you* who has got what it takes to lead and direct, not him."

"Us. We, I mean," he corrected, absently.

"Uh-huh; us-we. One, now and forever. Hot Dog! Anyway, he wants us to and we want to so everything's lovely and so let's get to work on Fatso and his Foster. I think we ought to have some fun for a change and that'll be a lot. When do we want to hit him?"

"Any day Monday through Friday. Nine-fifteen A.M. Eastern Daylight time. Plus or minus one minute."

"Nice! Catch him *in flagrante delicto*. Lovely—shovel on the coal, my intrepid engineer!"

On a Wednesday morning, then, at twelve minutes past nine EDT, the *Pleiades* hung poised, high over the Chancellery of Solar System Enterprises, Incorporated.

"Remember, Belle!" Garlock was pacing the Main. "To keep 'em staggering we'll have to land slugging and beat 'em to every punch. You did a wonderful job on her last time, and it's been eating on her ever since. She's probably been rehearsing in front of a mirror just how she's going to tear you apart next time and just how she's going to spit out the pieces. Last time, you were cold, stiff, rigidly for-

mal, and polite. So this time it'll be me, and I'll be hot and bothered, dirty, low, coarse, lewd, and very, very rough."

Belle threw back her head and laughed. "Rough? Yes. Vicious, contemptuous, or ugly; yes. A master of fluent, biting, and pyrotechnic profanity; yes. But low or dirty or coarse or lewd, Clee? Or any one of the four, to say nothing of them all? Uh-uh. Ferber's a filthy beast, of course; but even he knows you're one of the cleanest men that ever lived. They'd *know* it was an act."

"Not unless I give 'em time to think—or unless you do, before he fires Jim—in which case we'll lose the game anyway. But how about you? If I can knock 'em too groggy to think, will you carry on and keep 'em that way?"

"Watch my blasts!" Belle giggled gleefully. "I never tried anything like that—any more than you have—but I'll guarantee to be just as low, dirty, coarse, lewd, and crude as you are. Probably more so, because in this particular case it'll be fun. You see, you're a man—you can't possibly despise and detest that slimy stinker either in the same way or as much as I do."

"This ought to be good. Cut the rope, Jim."

Even before the starship came to rest, Garlock drove a probe into the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Chancellery—an utterly unheard-of act of insolence.

"Foster! This is the *Pleiades* coming in. Garlock calling. Hot up the tridi and the recorder, Toots. Put Fatso on, and snap into it . . . I said shake a leg!"

"Why, I . . . You . . ."

"Stop stuttering and come to life, you half-witted bag! Gimme Ferber and hurry it up—this ship's tricky."

"Why, you . . . I never . . ." Ferber's outraged First Secretary could scarcely talk. "He . . . he is . . ."

"I know, Babe, I know—I could set that to music and sing it, with gestures. 'Chancellor Ferber is in conference and cannot be disturbed,' he mimicked, savagely. "Put him on now—but *quick!*"

The tridi tank brightened up; Chancellor Ferber's image appeared. He was disheveled, surprised and angry, but Garlock gave him no chance to speak.

"Well, Fatso—at last! Where the *hell* have you been all morning? I want some stuff, just as fast as God will let you get it together," and he began to read off, as fast as he could talk, a long list of highly technical items.

Ferber tried for many seconds to break in, and Garlock finally allowed him to do so.

"Are you crazy, Garlock?" he shouted. "What in hell's name are you bothering *me* with *that* stuff for? You know better than that—make out your requisitions and send them through channels!"

"Channels, hell!" Garlock shouted back. "Hasn't it got through your four-inch-thick skull into your idiot's brain yet that I'm in a hurry? I don't want this stuff today; I want it day before yesterday—this damned junk-heap is apt to fall apart any minute. So quit goggling and slobbering at me, you wall-eyed, slimy, fat toad. Get that three hundred weight of suet into action. *Hump* yourself!"

"You . . . you . . . Why, I was never so insulted . . ."

"Insulted? You?" Garlock out-roared him. "Listen, Fatso. If I ever set out to really insult you, you'll know it—it'll blister all the paint off the walls. All I'm trying to do now is get you off that fat butt of yours and get some action."

Ferber became purple and pounded his desk in consuming anger.

Garlock yelled louder and pounded harder. "Start rounding up this stuff—but *fast*—or I'll come down there and take your job away from you and do it myself—and for your own greasy hide's sake you'd better believe I'm not just chomping my choppers, either."

"You'll *What?*" Ferber screamed. "*You're fired!*"

"You fire *me?*" Garlock mimicked the scream. "And make it stick? You'd better write that one up for the funnies. Why, you lard-brain, you couldn't fire a cap-pistol."

"Foster!" Ferber yelled. "Terminate Garlock as of now.

Insubordination, and misconduct, abuse of position, incompetence, malfeasance — everything else you can think of. Blacklist him all over the System!"

At the word "fired" Belle had leaped to her feet and had stopped laughing.

"Miss Bellamy!" Ferber snapped.

"Yes, sir?" she answered, sweetly.

"You are hereby promoted to be Head of the . . ."

"Oh, yeah?" Belle sneered, her voice cutting like a knife. "You unprincipled, lascivious, lecherous *Hitler!* Have you got the unmitigated gall to take *me* for a floozie? To think you can add *me* to your collection of bootlicking, round-heeled tramps?"

"You're fired and blacklisted too!"

"How nice! You know, I don't know of *anything* I'd rather have happen to me?"

"Get James on there—you, James . . ."

"You don't need to fire me, you fat-headed old goat," James said, contemptuously. "I've already quit—the exact second you fired Cleo."

"No you didn't!" Ferber screamed. "Resignation not accepted. You're *Fired!* Dishonorably discharged — blacklisted everywhere—you'll *never* get another job — *anywhere!* And here's your slip, too!" Miss Foster was very fast on the machines.

James 'ported his slip up into

the *Pleiades*, just as Garlock and Belle had done with theirs, and disappeared with it as they had; reappearing almost instantly.

"Montandon!"

"Chancellor Ferber, are you completely out of your mind? You can't discharge either Miss Bellamy or me."

"I can't?" he gloated. "Why not?"

"Because neither of us is employed. By anybody."

"That's right, Fatso," Belle said. "We just came along. Just to keep the boys company. It's lonesome, you know, 'way out in deep space."

Miss Foster ripped a half-filled-out termination form out of her machine and hurled it into a waste-basket. Ferber's jaw dropped and his eyes stared glassily, but he rallied quickly.

"I can blacklist her, though, and maybe you think I won't. Belle Bellamy will never get another job in this whole solar system as long as she lives, except through me! Maybe I'll hire her some day, for something, and maybe I won't. Are you listening, Bellamy?"

"Not only listening, I'm reveling in every word." Belle laughed derisively. "I hate to shatter such wonderful dreams—or do I? You see, the *Pleiades* really works, and the Galaxians own her; lock, stock, and barrel. You wouldn't have any part of her, remember? Insisted on payment for every nut, wire, and service? Now, they want to hire us four for a big operation with this

starship. Since you only loaned Garlock and James to them, you might have made some legal trouble on that score, but now that you've fired them both—and in such *conclusive* language!—we're all set. So when you blacklist us with the Society, please let me know—I want to take a tridi in technicolor of you doing it. How do you like *them* parsnips, Your Royal Fatness?"

"I'll see about that!" Ferber stormed. "We'll have an injunction out in an hour!"

"Go ahead," Garlock said, with a wide grin. "Have fun—the Galaxians have legal eagles too, you know. One thing Belle forgot. Just in case you recover consciousness some time and want to steal our termination papers back—especially Belle's; what a howler *that* was!—don't try it. They're in a Gunther-blocked safe."

Then, as comprehension began to dawn on Ferber's face:

"S-u-c-k-è-r," Garlock drawled.

The *Pleiades* disappeared.

CHAPTER 9

THE *Pleiades* landed on Margonia's Galaxian Field, where the Tellurians found the project running smoothly, a little ahead of schedule. Delcamp and Fao were working at their fast and efficient pace, but the hairy pair from Thaker seemed to be, literally, everywhere at once.

"Hi, Belle." Fao 'ported up and shook hands warmly. "I

thought I was going to have the first double-Prime baby, until she appeared on the scene."

"Didn't it make you mad? I'd've been furious."

"Maybe a little at first, but not after I'd talked with her for half a minute. She'd never even thought of that angle. Besides, she thinks the whole galaxy is fairly crawling with double-Primes."

"That's funny—so does Clee. But there are other things—strictly not angles—that she hasn't thought of, too. If those coveralls were half an inch tighter they'd choke her to death. You'd think she'd . . ."

"Huh?" Fao interrupted. "You should scream—oh, that ridiculous Tellurian prud . . ."

"It *isn't* ridiculous!" Belle snapped. "And it isn't prudishness, either—not with me, anyway. It's just that," she ran an indicative glance over Fao's lean, trim flanks and hard, flat abdomen, "it spoils your figure. It's only temporary, of course, but . . ."

"Spoils it! Why, how *utterly* idiotic! Why, it's magnificent! Just as soon as it starts to show on me, Belle, I'm going to start wearing only half as many clothes as I've got on now."

"You couldn't." Belle eyed the other girl's bathing-suit-like garment. Except for being blue instead of yellow, it was the same as the one she had worn before. "Not without the League for Public Decency sending the wagon out after you."

"Oh, Miss Experience? Well, three-quarters, maybe . . ."

"Hey, you two!" came Delcamp's hail. "How about cutting the gab and getting some work done?"

"Coming, boss! 'Scuse it, please!" and two fast and skillful women went efficiently to work.

With six Prime Operators on the job the work went on very rapidly, yet without error. The *Celestial Queen* was finished, tested, and found perfect, one full day ahead of James' most optimistic estimate for construction alone. The six Primes conferred.

"Do you want us to help you pick up the other Primes?" Delcamp asked. "Your Main, big as it is, will be crowded, and we have three ships here now instead of one."

"I don't think so . . . no," Garlock decided. "We told 'em we'd do it, and in the *Pleiades*; so we'd better. Unless, Alsyne, you don't agree?"

"I agree. The point, while of course minor, is very well taken. We and our Operators—we brought six along; experts in their various fields—can serve best by working on Tellus with its Galaxian Society in getting ready for the meeting."

"Oh, of course," Fao said. "Probably Deg and I should do the same thing?"

"That would be our thought." The two Thakerns were thinking—and lepping—in fusion.

"However," they went on carefully, "it must not be and is not our intent to sway you in any action or decision. While not all of you four, perhaps, are as yet fully mature, not one of you should be subjected to any additional exterior stresses."

"I hope you don't think that way about *all* Primes," Garlock said, grimly. "I'm going to smack some of those kids down so hard that their shirt-tails will roll up their backs like window shades."

"If you find such action either necessary or desirable, we will join you quite happily in it. We go."

The four remaining Primes looked at each other in puzzled surprise.

"What do you think about *that*?" Garlock asked finally, of no one in particular.

"I don't understand them," Fao said, "but they're mighty nice people."

"Do you suppose, Clee," Belle nibbled at her lower lip, "that we're getting off on the wrong foot with uniforms and admirals and things? That with really adult Primes running things the Galactic Service would run itself? No bosses or anything?"

"Umnnngk." Garlock grunted as though Belle had slugged him. "I hope not. Or do I? Anyway, not enough data yet to make speculation profitable. But I wonder, Miss Bellamy, if it would be considered an unjustifiable attempt to sway you in any action or decision if I were

to suggest— Oh, ever so diffidently!—that if we're going to saddle up our bronks and ride out on roundup tomorrow morning we ought to be logging some sack-time right now?"

"Considering the source, as well as and/or in connection with the admittedly extreme provocation," Belle straightened up into a regal pose, "You may say, Mister Garlock, without fear of successful contradiction, that in this instance no umbrage will be taken, at least for the moment." She broke the pose and giggled infectiously. "'Night, you two lovely people!"

Belle was still sunny and gay when the *Pleiades* reached Lizzoria; Garlock was inwardly happy and outwardly content. Semolo, however, was his usual intransigent self. In fact, if it had not been for Mirea Mitala, and the fact that she—metaphorically—did pin Semolo's ears back, Garlock would not have taken him aboard at all.

Thus, after loading on only one pair of Primes, that auspiciously-beginning day had lost some of its luster; and as the day wore on it got no better fast. Baver of Falne had not learned anything, either—only Garlock's intervention saved the cocky and obstreperous Semolo from a mental blast that would have knocked him out cold.

Then there were Onthave and Lerthe of Crenna; Korl and Kirl of Gleer; Parleof and Ginseona of Pasquerone; Atnim and So-

tara of Flandoon, and eighty others. Very few of them were as bad as Semelo; some of them, particularly the Pasqueronians and the Gleerans, were almost as good as Delcamp and Fao.

This was the first time that any pair of them had ever come physically close to any other Prime. Many of them had not really believed that any Primes abler than themselves existed. The *Pleiades* was crowded, and Garlock and Belle were not giving to any of them the deference and consideration and submissive respect which each considered his unique due.

Wherefore the undertaking was neither easy nor pleasant; and both Tellurians were tremendously relieved when, the last pair picked up, they flashed the starship back to Tellus and Delcamp, Fao, and the Thakerns' ported themselves aboard.

"Give me your attention, please," Garlock said, crisply. Then, after a moment, "Any and all who are not tuned to me in five seconds will be returned immediately to their home planets and will lose all contact with this group' . . .

"That's better. For some of you this has been a very long day. For all of you it has been a very trying day. You were all informed previously as to what we had in mind. However, since you are young and callow, and were thoroughly convinced of your own omniscience and omnipotence, it is natural enough that you derived little or no benefit

from that information. You are now facing reality, not your own fantasies.

"Each pair of you has been assigned a suite of rooms in Galaxian Hall. Each suite is furnished appropriately; each is fully Gunthered for self-service.

"This meeting has not been announced to the public and, at least for the present, will not be. Therefore none of you will attempt to communicate with anyone outside Galaxian Hall. Anyone making any such attempt will be surprised.

"The meeting will open at eight o'clock tomorrow morning in the auditorium. The Thakerns and the Margonians will now inform you as to your quarters." There was a moment of flashing thought. "Dismissed."

At one second before eight o'clock the auditorium was empty. At eight o'clock, ninety-eight human beings appeared in it; six on the stage, the rest occupying the first few rows of seats.

"Good morning, everybody," Garlock said, pleasantly. "Everyone being rested, fed, and having had some time in which to consider the changed reality faced by us all, I hope and am inclined to believe that we can attain friendship and accord. We will spend the next hour in becoming acquainted with each other. We will walk around, not teleport. We will meet each other physically, as well as mentally. We will learn each other's

forms of greeting and we will use them. This meeting is adjourned until nine o'clock—or, rather, the meeting will begin then."

For several minutes no one moved. All blocks were locked at maximum. Each Prime used only his eyes.

Physically, it was a scene of almost overpowering perfection. The men were, without exception, handsome, strong, and magnificently male. The women, from heroically-framed Fao Talaho up—or down?—to surprisingly slender Mirea Mitala, all were arrestingly beautiful; breathtakingly proportioned; spectacularly female.

Clothing varied from complete absence to almost complete coverage, with a bewildering variety of intermediate conditions. Color was rampant.

Hair—or lack of it—was also an individual and highly variant matter. Some of the women, like Belle and Fao, were content with one solid but unnatural shade. One shaven head—Mirea Mitala's—was deeply tanned, but unadorned, even though the rest of her body was almost covered by precious stones. Another was decorated with geometrical and esoteric designs in eye-searing colors. A third supported a structure—it could not possibly be called a hat—of spun metal and gems.

Among the medium- and long-hairs there were two-, three-, and multi-toned jobs galore.

Some of the color-combinations were harmonious; some were sharply contrasting, such as black and white; some looked as though their wearers had used the most violently-clashing colors they could find.

The prize-winner, however, was Therea of Thaker's enormous, inexplicable mop; and it was that phenomenon that first broke the ice.

The girl with the decorated scalp had been glancing questioningly at neighbor after neighbor, only to be met by uncompromising stares. Finally, however, her gaze met another, as interested as her own. This second girl, whose coiffure was a high-piled confection of black, white, yellow, red, blue, and green; half-masted her screen and said:

"Oh, thanks, Jethay of Lodie-Yann. I'm glad everybody isn't going to stay locked up all day. I'm Ginseona of Pasquerone. They call me 'Jin' whenever they want to call me anything printable. And *this*," she dug a knuckle into her companion's short ribs, whereupon he jumped, whirled around, lowered his screen, and grinned, "is my . . . the boy friend, Parleof. Also of Pasquerone, of course. Par, both Jethay and I . . ."

"Call me 'Jet'—everybody does," Jethay said: almost shyly, for a Prime.

"Both Jet and I have been wondering about that woman's hair—over there. How could you *possibly* give a head of hair a

static charge of fifty or a hundred kilovolts and not have it leak off?"

"You couldn't, unless it was a perfectly-insulated wig . . . but it looks as though she did, at that . . ." and Parleof paused in thought.

"Maybe Byuk would have an idea or two," and Jet uttered aloud a dozen or so crackling syllables that sounded as though they could have been ladylike profanity. Whatever they were, Byuk jumped, too, and tuned in with the other three.

"Oh, it's quite easy, really," Therea said then. "Look." Her mass of hair cascaded gracefully down around her neck and shoulders. "Look again." Each hair stood fiercely out all by itself, exactly as before. "All you young people will learn much more difficult and much more important things before this meeting is over. I cannot tell you how glad I am that so many of you are here."

And so it went, all over the auditorium. Once cracked, the ice broke up fast.

Fao and Delcamp worked hard; so did Belle and Garlock. Alsyne was a potent force indeed—his abounding vitality and his tremendous smile broke down barriers that logic could not affect. And Therea worked near-miracles; did more than the other five combined. Her sympathy, her empathy, her understanding and feeling, were as great as Lola's own; her opera-

tive ability was as much greater than Lola's as Lola's was greater than that of a bobby-soxed babysitter.

Thus, when half of the hour was gone, Garlock heaved a profound sigh of relief. He wouldn't have half the trouble he had expected—it was not going to be a riot. And when he called the meeting to order he was pleasanter and friendlier than Belle had ever before seen him.

"While I am calling this meeting to order, it is only in the widest possible sense that I am its presiding officer, for we have as yet no organization by the delegated authority of which any man or any woman has any right to preside. Yesterday I ruled by force; simply because I am stronger than any one of you or any pair of you. Today, in the light of the developments of the last hour, that rule is done; except, perhaps, for one or two isolated and non-representative cases which may develop today. By this time tomorrow, I hope that we will be forever done with the law of claw and fang. For, as a much abler man has said—'To the really mature mind, the concept of status is completely invalid.'"

"He's putting that as a direct quote, Alsyne, and it isn't." Belle lanced the thought.

"He thinks it is," Alsyne flashed back. *"That is the way his mathematician's mind recorded it."*

"This meeting is informal, preliminary and exploratory. A

meeting of minds from which, we hope, a useful and workable organization can be developed. Since you all know what we think it basically should be, there is no need to repeat it.

"I must now say something that a few of you will construe as a threat. You are all Prime Operators. Each pair of you is the highest development of a planet, perhaps of a solar system. You can learn if you will. You can cooperate if you will. Any couple here who refuses to learn, and hence to cooperate, will be returned to its native planet and will have no further contact with this group.

"I now turn this meeting over to our first moderators, Alysye and Therea of Thaker; the oldest and ablest Prime Operators of us all."

"Thank you, Garlock of Tellus. One correction, however, if you please. I who speak am neither this man nor this woman standing here, but both. I am the Prime Unit of Thaker. For brevity, and for the purposes of this meeting only, I could be called simply 'Thaker.' Before calling for general discussion I wish to call particular attention to two points, neither of which has been sufficiently emphasized.

"First, the purpose of a Prime Operator is to serve, not to rule. Thus, no Prime should be or will be 'boss' of anything, except possibly of his own starship.

"Second, since we have no data we do not know what form the proposed Galactic Service will

assume. One thing, however, is sure. Whatever power of enforcement or of punishment it may have will derive, not from its Primes, but from the fact that it will be an arm of the Galactic Council, which will be composed of Operators only. No Prime will be eligible for membership."

Thaker went on to explain how each pair could obtain instruction and assistance in many projects, including starships. How each pair would, when they were mature enough, be coached in the use of certain abilities they did not as yet have. He suggested procedures and techniques to be employed in the opening up of each pair's volume of space. He then asked for questions and comments.

Semolo was the first. "If I'm a good little boy," he sneered, "and do exactly as I'm told, and take over the region you tell me to and not the one I want to, what assurance have I that some other Prime, just because he's a year older than I am, won't come along and take it away from me?"

"Your question is meaningless," Thaker replied. "Since you will not 'take over,' or 'have,' or 'own,' any region, it cannot be 'taken away from you.'"

"Then I will . . ." Semolo began.

"You will keep still!" came a clear, incisive thought, just as Garlock was getting ready to intervene. Miss Mitala then

switched from thought, which everyone there could understand, and launched a ten-second blast of furious speech. Semolo wilted and the girl went on in thought: "He'll be good—or else."

A girl demanded recognition and got it. "Semolo's right. What's the use of being Primes if we can't get any good out of it? We're the strongest people of our respective worlds. I say we're bosses and should keep on being bosses."

Garlock got ready to shut her up, then paused; holding his fire.

"Ah, yes, friend Garlock, you are maturing fast," came Thaker's thought and, in answer to Garlock's surprise, it went on, "This situation will, I think, be self-adjusting; just as will be those in the as yet unexplored regions of space."

The girl kept on. "I, at least, am going to keep on bossing my own planet, milking it just as I . . ."

Her companion had been trying to crack her shield. Failing in that, he stepped in close and tapped her—solidly, but with carefully-measured force—behind the ear. Before she could fall, he ported her back up into their quarters. "This happens all the time," he explained to the group at large. "Carry on."

Discussion went on, with less and less acrimony, all the rest of the day. And the next day, and the next. Then, argument having reached the point of di-

minishing returns, the three starships took the forty-six couples home.

The six Primes went into Evans' office, where the lawyer was deeply engaged with Gerald Banks, the Galaxians' Public Relations Chief. Banks was holding his head in both hands.

"Garlock, maybe *you* can tell me," Banks demanded. "How much of this stuff, if any, can I publish? And if so, *how*?"

"Nothing," Garlock said, flatly.

"What do you think, Thaker?" Belle asked. "You're smarter than we are."

"What Thaker thinks has no bearing," Garlock said.

Belle, Fao, and Delcamp all began to protest at once, but they were silenced by Thaker himself.

"Garlock is right. My people are not your people; I know not at all how your people think or what they will or will not believe. I go."

"That lets Deg and me out too, then, double-plus," Fao said with a grin, "so we'll leave that baby on your laps. We go, too."

"Well, little Miss Weisenheimer," Garlock smiled quizzically at Belle, "You grabbed the ball—what are you going to do with it?"

"Nothing, I guess . . ." Belle thought for a minute. "We couldn't stuff any part of that down the throat of a simple-minded six-year-old. We haven't really *got* anything, anyway."

Time enough, I think, when we have six or seven hundred planets in each region, instead of only one planet. Maybe we'll know something by then. Does that make sense?"

"It does to me," Garlock said, and the others agreed.

"That Thakern 'we go' business sounds rough at first, but it's contagious. Fao and Deggi caught it, and I feel like I'm coming down with it myself. How about you, Clee?"

"We go," Belle and Garlock said in unison, and vanished.

Aboard the *Pleiades*, the next few days passed quietly enough. James set up, in the starship's memory banks, a sequence to mass-produce instruction tapes and blueprints. Garlock and Belle began systematically to explore the Tellurian Region. Now, however, their technique was different. If either Prime of any world was not enthusiastic about the project—

"Very well. Think it over," they would say. "We will get in touch with you again in about a year," and the starship would go on to the next planet.

On Earth, however, things became less and less tranquil with every day that passed. For, in deciding not to publish anything, Garlock had not considered at all the basic function and the tremendous ability, power, and scope of *The Press*. And Galaxian Hall had never before been closed to the public; not for any hour of any day of any year of

its existence. A non-profit organization, dependent upon the public for its tremendous income, the Galaxian Society had always courted that public in every possible ethical way.

Thus, in the first hour of closure, a bored reporter came out, read the smoothly-phrased notice, and lepped it in to the desk. It might be worth, he thought, half an inch.

Later in the day, however, the world's most sensitive news-nose began to itch. Did, or did not, this quiet, unannounced closing smell ever-so-slightly of cheese? Wherefore Benjamin Bundy, the newscaster who had covered the starship's maiden flight, went out himself to look the thing over. He found the whole field closed. Not only closed, but Gunther-blocked impenetrably tight. He studied the announcement, his sixth sense—the born newsman's sense for news—probing every word.

"Regret . . . research . . . of such extreme delicacy . . . vibration . . . temperature control . . . one one-hundredth of one degree Centigrade . . ."

He sought out his long-time acquaintance Banks; finding him in a temporary office half a block away from the Hall. "What's the story, Jerry?" he asked. "The *real* story, I mean?"

"You know as much about it as I do, Ben. Garlock and James don't waste time trying to detail me on that kind of business, you know."

This should have satisfied any

newshawk, but Bundy's nose still itched. He mulled things over for a minute, then probed, finding that he could read nothing except Banks' outermost, most superficial thoughts.

"Well . . . maybe . . . but . . ." Then Bundy plunged. "All you have to do, Jerry, is tell me screens-half-down that your damn story is true."

"And that's the one thing I can't do," Banks admitted; and Bundy could not detect that any part of his sheepishness was feigned. "You're just too damned smart, Ben."

"Oh—one of *those* things? So that's it?"

"Yup. I told Evans it might not work."

That should have satisfied the reporter, but it didn't. "Now it doesn't smell just a trifle cheesy; it stinks like rotten fish. You won't go screens down on that one, either."

"No comment."

"Oh, joy!" Bundy exulted. So big that Gerald Banks, the top press-agent of all time, actually doesn't *want* publicity! The star-ship works—this lack-of-control stuff is the bunk—from here to another star in nothing flat—Garlock's back, and he's brought—what *have* you got in there, Jerry?"

"The only way I can tell you is in confidence, for Evans' release. I'd like to, Ben, believe me, but I can't."

"Confidence, hell! Do you think we won't get it?"

"In that case, no comment."

The interview ended and the siege began.

Newshounds and detectives questioned and peered and probed. They dug into morgues, tabulating and classifying. They recalled and taped and sifted all the gossip they had heard. They got a picture of sorts, but it was maddeningly confusing and incomplete. And, since it was certain that inter-systemic matters were involved, they could not extrapolate—any guess was far too apt to be wrong. Thus nothing went on the air or appeared in print; and, although the surface remained calm, all newsdom seethed to its depths.

Wherefore haggard Banks and harried Evans greeted Garlock with shouts of joy when the four wanderers came back to spend the week end on Earth.

"I'll talk to 'em," Garlock decided, after the long story had been told. "Have somebody get hold of Bundy and ask him to come out."

"Get *hold* of him!" Banks snorted. "He's here. Twenty-four hours a day. Eating sandwiches and cat-napping on chairs in the lobby. All you have to do is unseal that door."

Garlock flung the door wide. Bundy rushed in, followed by a more-or-less steady stream of some fifty other top-bracket newspeople, both men and women.

"Well, Garlock, perhaps *you* will give us some screens-down facts?" Bundy asked, angrily.

"I'll give you *all* the screens-down . . ."

"Clee!" "You're crazy!" "You can't!" "Don't!" Belle and all the Operators protested at once.

Ignoring the objections, Garlock cut his shield to half and gave the whole group a true account of everything that had happened in the galaxy. Then, while they were all too stunned to speak, a grin of saturnine amusement spread over his dark, five-o'clock-shadowed face.

"You pestiferous gnats insisted on grabbing the ball," he sneered. "Now let's see you run with it."

Bundy came out of his trance. "What a story!" he yelled. "We'll plaster it . . ."

"Yeah," Garlock said, dryly. "What a story. Exactly."

"Oh." Bundy deflated suddenly. "You'll have to prove it—demonstrate it—of course."

"Of course? You tickle me. Not only do I not have to prove it, I won't. I won't even confirm it."

Bundy glared at Garlock, then whirled on Banks. "If you don't give me this in shape to use, you'll never get another line or mention anywhere!"

"Oh, no?" For the first time in his professional life Banks gloated, openly and avidly. "From now on, my friend, who is in the saddle? Who is going to come to whom? Oh, *brother!*"

When the fuming newsmen had gone, Garlock said, "It'll leak, of course."

"Of course," Banks agreed. "It is rumored . . . 'from a usually reliable source . . . ' and so on. Nothing definite, but each one of them will want to put out the first and biggest."

"That's what I figured. It'll have to break sometime and I thought easing it out would be best . . . but wait a minute . . ." he thought for two solid minutes. "But we're going to need a lot of money, and we're just about broke, aren't we?" This thought was addressed to Frank Macey, the Galaxians' treasurer.

"Worse than broke—much worse."

"I could loan you a couple of credits, Frank," Belle said, brightly. "But go ahead, Clee."

"People like to be sidewalk superintendents. Suppose they could watch the construction of an outpost so far away that nobody ever dreamed of ever getting there. Could you do anything with that, Jerry?"

"*Could I! Just!*" and Banks went into a rhapsody.

"That's the first good idea any one of you crackpots has had for five years," Macey said, suddenly. "But wouldn't transportation of material and so on present problems?"

"No; just buying it," Garlock said, soberly. "Oh, rather, paying for it."

"No trouble there . . ."

"What?" Belle exclaimed. "No trouble," it says here in fine print? How the old skinflint has changed—instead of screaming his head off about spending

money he's actually *offering* to. Frank, I'll loan you *three* credits!"

"Hush, honey-chile, the men-folks are talking man-business. Look, Clee. We'll use the *Pleiades* at first, while we're building a regular transport. A hundred passengers per trip, one thousand credits one way . . ."

"Wow!" Belle put in. "Our ex-skinflint is now a bare-faced, legally-protected robber."

"By no means, Belle," Evans said. "How much would that be per mile?"

"Say ten round trips per day. That would be twenty million a day gross for a small ship not intended for passenger service. When we get ships built . . . and the extras . . ." The money-man went into a financial revel of his own.

"Lots of extras," Banks agreed. "And oh, *brother*, what a public-relations dream of heaven!"

"Maybe I'm dumb," Garlock broke in, "but just what are you going to use for money to get started?"

"The minute we confirm any part of the story, the credit of the Galaxian Society will jump from X-O to AA-A1."

"Oh. So Belle and I will have to lose our *Pleiades* for a while. I don't like that, but we do need the money . . . but we can have her for this coming week?"

"Of course."

"So maybe we'd better break the story now, instead of letting it leak."

"Can you, after what you just told them?"

"Sure I can." He set his mind and searched. "Bundy, this is Garlock . . ."

"So what am I supposed to do—burst into tears of joy?"

"Save it. I changed my mind. You can break it as fast and as hard as you like. I'll play along."

"Yeah? Why the switch? What's the angle?"

"Strictly commercial. Get it from Banks."

"And you'll—personally—go on my hour with it?"

"Yes. Also, we'll demonstrate—take you to any star-system in the galaxy. You and all the rest of the newshawks who were here and any fifty VIP's you want to invite. Tomorrow morning all right with you?"

"You, personally, in the *Pleiades*?" Bundy insisted.

"Better than that. The other two starships, too. You've got them—particularly those four Primes—clearly in mind?"

"Not exactly, there was so much of it. Spread it on me now, huh?" Garlock did so. "Thanks, pal, for the scoop. I'll crash it right now, and follow up with Banks. 'Bye!"

"Think you can deliver on that, Clee?" Banks asked.

"Sure. Both Deggi and Alsine will need a lot of extra money, fast. They'll play along."

They did; and that three-star-ship tour—which visited twenty solar systems instead of one—

was the most sensational thing old Earth had ever spawned.

Belle and Garlock did not spend that week end on Earth. "We go," they said, as soon as the *Pleiades* was empty of pressmen, and they took James and Lola along. "If we *never* see another such brawl as this is going to be," Belle told Banks, who was basking in glory and entreating them to stay on for the show, "it will be exactly twenty minutes too soon."

Thus it came about that Earth's first four deep-spacemen were completely out of reach when unexpected developments began.

Alonzo P. Ferber was one of the VIP's on Bundy's personally-conducted tour of the stars. As has been said, he was a very able executive. He had an extremely keen profit-sense. This new thing smelled — simply reeked — of money. SSE would *have* to get in on it.

Ferber was not thin-skinned; where money was concerned it would never even occur to him to cherish grudges or to retain animosities. Wherefore SSE's purchasing department suggested to the Galaxian Society that negotiations be opened concerning licenses, franchises, royalties, and so on. These suggestions were politely but firmly brushed off. Then emissaries were sent, of ever-increasing caliber and weight. Next, Ferber himself tried the tri-di; and finally he came in person.

Rebuffed, he made such legally-sound threats that Evans and Macey agreed to a meeting; stating flatly, however, that no commitments could possibly be made without the knowledge and approval of the Society's president, Cleander Garlock. Thus, at the meeting, the Galaxians made only two statements that were even approximately definite. One was that Garlock would probably return to Earth during the afternoon or evening of the following Friday; the other that they would take the matter up with Garlock as soon as they could.

After that meeting Macey was unperturbed, but Evans was a deeply worried man.

"You see," he explained, the real crux was not even mentioned."

"No? What is it, then?"

"Operators, Primes, and the practically non-existent laws pertaining to their . . . what? Labor? Skill? Genius? For instance, could Garlock be forced to do whatever it is that he does? On the other hand, if Ferber offered Belle Bellamy five million credits a year to 'work' for SSE, is there anything we could do about it?"

"Oh. I thought all there was to it was that you'd delay 'em for a year or so and that'd be it."

"Far from it. To date I have listed fifty-eight points for which, as far as we can learn, there are no precedents," and the lawyer called a meeting of his staff.

For Belle and Garlock, the week went fast. On Friday afternoon, high above Earth's Galaxian Field, Garlock said, more than half regretfully, "No more fun. Back to the desk. Back to the salt-mines."

"I weep for you," Belle snickered. "Sob, sob. Shed him a tear, Lola."

"One tear coming up. Oh, woe; oh, woe . . ."

"Oh, whoa!" James snorted. "Why the sob-and-moan routine, Clee, from a guy who's going to be monarch of all he surveys?"

"His conscience aches him," Belle explained. "This monarching business is tough if you haven't thought about how to monarch, and he hasn't. Have you, Clee?"

"Not a lick." Garlock smiled slightly. "I been busy."

"You better start to," she advised, darkly. "You aren't busy now and we have an hour. We better confer—I'll make like a slave-driver."

They 'ported into his room and he set the blocks. His attitude changed instantly. "Nice act, Belle. What was it all about?"

"That theory of yours. Your predictions are too uncannily accurate to be guesswork, and the more times you dead-center the bullseye the worse scared I get. I really want to know, Clee."

"Okay. It isn't complete—I need a lot more data—but I'll show you what I have. It's fairly strong medicine and it comes in big chunks."

"It would have to—it covers the whole macrocosmic universe, doesn't it?"

"Yes. I'll start with the striking fact that, on every out-galaxy planet we visited, the human beings were *Homo sapiens* to N decimal places. Fertile with each other and, according to expert testimony, with us. All planets had humanoid 'guardians,' the Arpalones and Arpales. Some, but not all, had one or more non-human, more-or-less-intelligent races, such as the Fumapties, the Lemarts, the Sencors, and so on. These other races never seemed to fight each other, but both races of Guardians fought any and all of them, on sight and to the death. What do those facts mean to you?"

"Nothing beyond face value. I've thought about them but I haven't been able to come up with anything."

"I have." He unrolled a sheet of drafting paper covered with diagrams, symbols, and equations. "But before I go into this stuff, consider the human body. How many red cells are there in your blood stream?"

"Billions, I suppose."

"And there are billions of human beings on billions of planets; each having red blood cells identical, as far as we know, with yours and mine. Also white cells. Also, sometimes, various kinds of pathogenic micro-organisms, such as staphs, streps, viruses, spiro, and so on."

"Okay. My thought is that the

Lemarts, Ozobes, and the like are analogous to disease-producing organisms. We saw the full range of effects—from none at all up to death itself.”

“But they—the Ozobes and so on—died, too.”

“How long do disease germs live in a human body after they’ve killed it?”

“But that horrible Dilipic—the golop. They don’t seem to fit.”

“Try that on for size as cancer. Also, the Arpalones typed us before they’d let us land on any planet. Why didn’t we blast them out of the way and land anyway?”

“Why, we didn’t want to. It wasn’t worth while.”

“We couldn’t. Psychic block. And if we had, we would have died. Different blood-types don’t mix.”

“So you and I are merely two red cells in the bloodstream of a super-doooper-galactic super-monster? Phooie!” she jeered. “That chestnut was propounded a thousand years ago. Are you trying to take me for a ride on *that* old sawhorse?”

“That’s the attitude I had at first. So now we’re ready for the chart.” He pointed to a group of symbols. “We start with symbolic logic; manipulating like so to get this.” There was a long mathematical dissertation; a mind-to-mind, rigorous, point-by-point proof.

“Q. E. D.” Garlock concluded.

“I see your math, and if I be-

lieved half of it I’d be scared witless. Those few pieces fit, but they’re scattered around in vast areas of blankness and you’re jumping around like the Swiss miss leaping from Alp to Alp. And how about our own galaxy, the most important piece of all? It’s different, and we’re different, mentally. That wrecks your whole theory.”

“No. I told you I need a lot more data. Also, beyond a certain point the analogy appears to get looser.”

“Appears to! It’s as loose as a goose!”

“Think a minute. Is it actually loose, or are we getting up into concepts that no human mind can grasp? That might be the case, you know.”

“Oh . . . You’re quite a salesman, Cleo, but I’m still not buying.”

“Our galaxy is a bit of specialized tissue—part of a ganglion, maybe. Over here, see? I’ll have to leave it dangling until we find some more like it.”

“I see. But anyway, you haven’t a tenth’s worth of real material on that whole sheet. Feed everything you have there into a computer and it’d just laugh at you.”

“Sure it would. The great advantage of the human brain is its ability to arrive at valid conclusions from incomplete data. For instance, what would your computer do with the figures you shot at me the day we started out? ‘Thirty-nine, twenty-two, thirty-nine. Five seven. One

thirty-five.' Yet they're completely informative."

"To anyone interested in that kind of figures, yes."

"Which includes practically all adults. Then take the figure three point one four one five nine. Compy would still be baffled; but, unlike the first set, most people would be, too."

"Yes. Perhaps two out of ten would get your message."

"Now take something really new, like the original work on gravitation or relativity. No possible computer would be of any use. That takes a *brain!*"

"The brain of a Newton or an Einstein, yes." Belle thought for a minute, then grinned at him impishly. "Now watch the brain of a Bellamy perform. Get into high gear, brain . . . I wish I knew something about biochemical embryology; but I read somewhere that ova are sterile, so our galaxy is an ovum. Therefore our super-galooper is a gal—which incontrovertible fact accounts for and explains rigorously the long-known truth that women always have been, are now, and always will be vastly superior to men in every quality, aspect, and . . ."

"Hold it!" Garlock snapped. His face hardened into intense concentration. Then: "Do you think you're kidding, Belle?"

"Why, of course I'm kidding, you big . . ."

"Look here, then." He picked up a pencil and filled in blank after blank after blank. "I'm making one unjustifiable as-

sumption—that the *Pleiades* is the first intergalactic starship. The super-being is a female, and she is just becoming pregnant . . ."

"Flapdoodle! There are no blood cells in a sperm, and I don't think there are any in an ovum."

"I didn't mention either sperm or ovum. The analogy is so loose here that it holds only in the broadest, most general terms. The actual process of reproduction is unknowable. But wherever we went, we changed things. Not only by what we actually did, but also as a catalyst—no . . ."

"No, not a catalyst. A hormone."

"Exactly. Each of these changes would cause others, and so on. An infinite series. Calling the first three terms alpha, beta, and gamma, we operate like this . . ." Garlock's pencil was flying now. "Following me?"

"On your tail." Belle was breathing hard; as the blank spaces became fewer and fewer her face began to turn white.

"From this we get that . . . and *that* makes the whole bracket tie into the same conclusion I had before. So, except for that one assumption, it's solid."

"My Lord, Clee!" Belle studied the chart. "I mentioned Newton and Einstein . . . add to that 'the brain of a Garlock, better than either.'" Then, seeing his reaction, "You're blushing. I didn't think . . ."

"Cut the comedy. You know I couldn't carry either of their hats to a dog-fight."

"And I would *never* have believed that you are basically modest."

"I said cut out the kidding, Belle."

"I'm deadly serious. A brain that could do *that*," she waved at the chart. "... well, even I am not enough of a heel to be little one of the most tremendous intuitions ever achieved by man. Not that I like it. It's horrible. It denies mankind everything that made him come up from the slime—everything that made him man."

"Not at all. Nothing is changed, in man's own frame of reference. It merely takes our thinking one step farther. That step, of course, isn't easy."

"*That* is the understatement of all time. What it will do, though, is set up an inferiority complex that would wipe out the whole human race."

"There might be some slight tendency. Also, since my basic assumption can't be justified, the whole thing may be fallacious. So I'm not going to publish it." He glanced at the chart and it vanished.

"Clee!" Belle stared, almost goggle-eyed. "With your name? The tremendous splash . . . I see. You're really grown up."

"Not all the way, probably; but pretty nearly—I hope."

"But some of the . . . not exactly corollaries, but . . ." Belle's

face, which had regained some of its color, began again to pale.

"Which one of the many?"

"The most shattering one, to me, concerns intelligence. If it is true that our vaunted mentality is only that of one blood cell compared to that of a whole brain . . . and that intelligence is banked, level upon level . . . well, it's simply mind-wrecking. I've been trying madly not to think of that concept at all, but I can't put it off much longer."

"Now's as good a time as any. I'll hold your hand."

"You'd better hold more of me than that, I think."

"I'll do even that, in a good cause." He put his arms around her; held her close. "Go ahead. Face it. All the way down and all the way up. You've got what it takes. You'll come back sane and it'll never bother you again."

She closed her eyes, put her head on his shoulder. Her every muscle went tense.

Neither of them ever knew how long they stood there, close-clasped and motionless in silence; but finally her muscles loosened. She lifted her head; raised her brimming eyes.

"All the way down?" he asked.

"To almost a geometrical point."

"And all the way up?"

"I touched the fringe of infinity."

"Intelligence all the way?"

"All the way. I couldn't understand any of them, of course, but I looked each one squarely in the eye."

"Good girl. And you're still sane."

"As much so as ever . . . more so, maybe." She disengaged herself, sat down on the bed, lighted a cigarette, and smoked half of it. Then she stood up. "Clee, if anything in the whole universe ever knocked hell out of anything, that did out of me. I'm going to do something that will take about ten minutes. Will you wait right here?"

"Of course. Take all the time you want."

When she came back Garlock leaped to his feet and stared speechlessly. He could not even whistle. Belle's hair was now its natural deep, rich chestnut, her lipstick was red, her nails were bare, and she wore a white shirt and an almost-knee-length crimson skirt.

"Here's what I'm going to do," she said, quietly. "I'm going to be a plain, ordinary brownette. I'm going to marry you as soon as we land; registered permanent family. I'm going to have six kids and spoil them rotten. In short, I have grown up—partly up, at least—too."

"Plain?" he managed, finally. "Ordinary? You? Yes—like a super-nova going off under a man's feet!" With a visible effort, Garlock pulled himself together. "I don't need to tell you what a surprise this is, and can't tell you what it means to me. But you never have said you love me. Hadn't you better?"

"I'm afraid to. Our next kiss will be different. I'd spoil all this nice new make-up." She tried to grin in her old-time fashion, but failed. She sobered, then, and went on with a completely new intensity. "Listen, Clee. I'm all done—forever—lying and pretending to you. I love you so much that . . . well, there simply aren't any thoughts. And when I think of how I acted, it hurts—Lord, how it hurts! I don't see how you can love me at all. It'd take a miracle."

"Miracles happen, then." He put both arms around her, very gently. "For the first time in my life I'm cutting my screens to zero. Come in."

"What?" For a moment she was unable to believe the thought. Then, cutting her own shield, she went fully into his mind. "Oh, I didn't dare hope you could *possibly* feel . . . Oh, this is wonderful, Clee—simply *wonderful!*"

As the two fully-opened minds met and joined she threw both arms around him and their embrace tightened as though their bodies were trying to become as nearly one as were their minds. Finally she pulled herself away and put up a solid block.

"What a mess!" she said, shakily. "Lipstick all over you."

"Why words, sweetheart? That was perfect."

"Oh, it was . . . but wide open, with such a mind as yours . . ." she paused, then came back to normal almost with a snap. ". . . but say; I'll bet that's what

Therea and Alsyne were doing. That 'fusion' thing We'll practise it tonight."

He pondered briefly. "Sure it was."

"But he said they learned it from us. How could he have, when we . . . Oh, we did, of course, in moments of high stress . . . but we didn't actually *know* it . . ." She paused.

"We wouldn't admit it, you mean, even to ourselves."

"Maybe; and of course it never occurred to us—callow youngsters we were then, weren't we?—that it could be done for more than a microsecond at a time. Or that two people could ever, possibly, *live* that way."

"Or what a life it would be. So let's chop this and get back to you and me."

"Uh-huh, let's," she agreed, but in a severely practical tone. "You've got lipstick even on your shirt. So change it and I'll go put on a new face and bring over some stuff and clean you up."

While she cleaned, she talked. "I told you our next kiss would be different, but I had no idea . . . wow! *That* will be as much different, too, I'm sure . . . Hm-h-h-nh?" Again she pressed herself against him; this time in a somewhat different fashion.

"Stop that, you little devil, or I'll . . ." His arms came up of themselves, but he forced them back down. ". . . No, I won't. We'll save that for tonight, too."

"I'll behave myself!" She

laughed, pure joy in voice, eyes, and smile. "I bet myself you wouldn't and I won! You're tall, solid gold, Clee darling—the absolute top."

"Thanks, sweetheart. I wish that were true," he said, soberly. "But I can't help wondering if two such hellions as you and I are can make a go of marriage—no, cancel that. We'll do it—all we have to figure out is how."

"I know what you mean. Not at first—it'll be purely wonderful then. After five years, say, when the glamor has worn off and I've had three of our six children and two of them are in bed with the epizootic and I'm all frazzled out and you're strung up tight as a bowstring with overwork and . . ."

"Hold it! Uh-uh. No. If we can live together six months—or even six weeks—without killing each other, we'll have it made. It's at first that it'll be rugged. No matter how rugged it gets, though, we'll know one thing for certain sure. We *couldn't* live apart. That'll give us enough leverage. Check?"

"And double check." She giggled sunnily. "I'll take care of any and all situations, whatever they are, that arise in the first six months. You'll be responsible for the next sixty years. That's a perfectly fair and equitable division of responsibility. Now kiss me and we'll go."

When Garlock cut the Gunther blocks, however, James' thought came instantly in. "Been trying

to get you for twenty minutes," and in a couple of seconds he brought Garlock and Belle up to date. "So Fatso's been waiting in Evans' office. He's throwing fits all over the place and Evans and Macey are going quietly mad."

"He'll have to wait," Garlock decided instantly. "No matter how many fits he has, no such decision is going to be made until there's enough of a Galactic Council to make it."

"Well, you'll have to tell him that yourself. In person."

"I'll do just that, and tell him so he'll stay told."

"Okay, but shake a . . ."

Belle and Garlock 'ported out into the Main, arms around each other like a couple of college freshmen.

". . . leg-g—ug—gug . . ."

James gurgled.

"Belle!" Lola shrieked. "Why—Belle—Bellamy!"

"What goes on here?" James demanded.

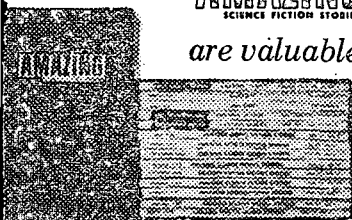
"Nothing much," Garlock replied, although he blushed almost as deeply as Belle did. "We just decided to quit fighting, is all. Cut the rope, Junior, and let the old bucket drop."

THE END

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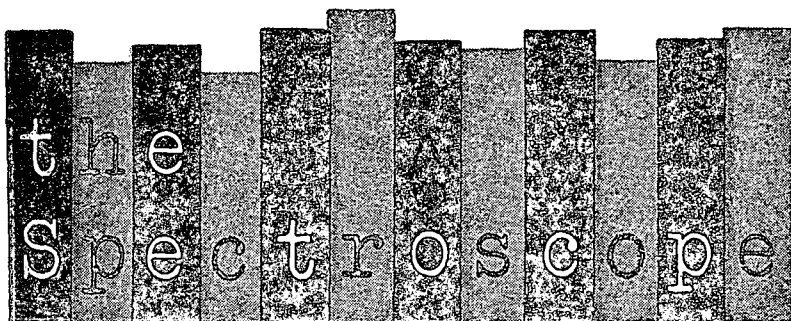
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the spectroscope

by S. E. COTTS

AFTER THE RAIN. *By John Bowen. 158 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.*

Here is one of the most refreshing books to come along in quite a while. One gets a hint of unexpected things even before opening the book, as the cover picture shows the Statue of Liberty up to her nostrils in water. But the nature of these unusual things does not really become apparent until Chapter Four. Before that there is still a chance that this will be a serious book. And indeed, the subject appears serious enough. Earth has been flooded by a deluge, the likes of which had not been seen since Noah's time. This in itself could certainly supply ample material for a novel. But Mr. Bowen hurries through most of it; the start of the rains, the cutting off of utilities and foodstuffs, the various plans for survival, until in the fourth section he has set the scene for the meat of his particular treatment. Here, as the novel bursts into the full flower of satire, we are brought into contact with a modern-day Noah, Arthur Renshaw, and his ill-assorted crew of survivors. Though the original Noah has a place in the Bible, nothing about this Noah-story is sacred to Mr. Bowen. Whether it is religion, psychiatry, art, love, communal living or any other equally juicy target, Mr. Bowen has his day with all of them. The result is highly recommended reading for those damp and rainy spring days ahead.

NOT IN SOLITUDE. *By Kenneth F. Gantz. 240 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$3.50.*

This novel of the first group to arrive on Mars is written by one who has the qualifications to supply those extra touches that spell authenticity. The author, Kenneth F. Gantz, is a Lt. Colonel in the U. S. Air Force and has edited a report on ballistic missiles. Though he has labeled the book fiction, his experiences in the service have

undoubtedly added to the variety of characters depicted and the wealth of detail about the workings of a spaceship. The men in his novel are distinct types, out of the ordinary in many ways, yet thoroughly credible. Though the setting is Mars, this isn't escape literature. Not for Colonel Gantz the philosophical musings or the transcendental excitement of much of the best interplanetary science fiction. His Mars is basically a dull monochrome and danger, when it comes does not wear an exotic brand. A good deal of it is caused by the tensions among the crew rather than between the crew and Mars.

The end result of this kind of writing is not overpowering, but a soundly-crafted study that one can more readily identify himself with. Maybe, if the day ever comes when the techniques behind good S-F writing become every writer's tool, Colonel Gantz's novel may sink into a different perspective. Now, however, one can be extremely grateful for it.

THE SACRED MUSHROOM. *By Andrija Puharich. 262 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$4.50.*

Here is an excellent example of fact being stranger and more fascinating than fiction. Andrija Puharich has published the gleanings of his studies of extrasensory perception (ESP) gathered through years of research. He is well qualified to write on the subject, being a doctor specializing in physiology and internal medicine. He has been investigating ESP since 1947.

As much as this reviewer would like to rave about the book, there are certain facets of it that are not wholly satisfactory. In a field such as ESP, where fact is just beginning to be separated from the masses of myth, one would rather that Dr. Puharich had spent more time on basic material than on following through with such an exhaustive analysis of one sensitive's complex Egyptian trances, no matter how unusual. In spite of this, one comes away with the greatest respect for the author's singleminded devotion to his cause.

In a field where the dearth of material is such an obstacle to one's curiosity, it is an unexpected paradise to find juxtaposed with the publication of this book, the opening of an exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History entitled, "The Quest of the Divine Mushroom. An Ancient Rite Rediscovered." This is a record of the quest for and actual finding of the mushroom rite in Mexico by Mr. R. Gordon Wasson and his wife. The Wassons are authorities on mushrooms. Mr. Wasson has met Dr. Puharich and it was his knowledge that convinced the doctor to delve more deeply into his sensitive's trance remarks about mushrooms. The book and exhibition are highly recommended to S-F fans who want to expand their knowledge about these little-explored byways of the human mind.



Or so you say

Dear Editor:

After reading your February '59 issue of *Amazing Stories* I just couldn't pass up the urge to write you a well deserved letter of congratulations. This issue is very reminiscent, to me, of the old pulp size *Amazing*.

The cover, although I am quite sure there will be a goodly number of fans who disagree with me, was excellent. I really like the way the artist's colors blend with, and clash with, each other.

I see old man Fairman is true to his word and has started writing some more of those stories that are typical of him. In my opinion "The World Burners" was the best story in this month's magazine.

How about getting a novel or two on underwater worlds?

Harry Thomas
Brookside
Sweetwater, Tenn.

◉ *Fairman is slaving over a hot typewriter these days, and when we can tear him away from those high-paying slick markets, we ask him to remember dear old Amazing. Incidentally, Paul has a chiller of a story coming up in the next (June) issue of Fantastic, our sister magazine.*

Dear Editor:

The January issue was the first issue of *Amazing* that I have read since the issue of January 1943. I don't think that the present magazine nearly meets up to the standards back in the early 40's. I thought, though, that the novel "Hunters Out of Time" was very good and that a sequel to it should be written.

Clem Perez
966 Wilson Dr.
New Orleans 19, La.

◉ *Clem, you have plenty of company on the "Hunters Out of Time" request. Just take a look at these paeans of praise on the next page!*

Dear Editor:

I have been an sf fan for the past few years. I have read quite a few short stories and novels during this time.

I think one of the best stories that I've read to date is "Hunters Out of Time," by Joseph E. Kelleam.

This novel isn't a "run-of-the-mill" type of science fiction story. It is quite different and most enjoyable.

More stories of this nature would probably be greatly appreciated by your fans.

Lita Ward
1914 W. Wallings Rd.
Cleveland 34, Ohio

Dear Editor:

Just finished reading "Hunters Out of Time" and greatly enjoyed it. Congratulations to Joseph E. Kelleam (is that a pen name?) and to *Amazing* for presenting truly engrossing reading.

In Burroughs' works on underground action there was always an open door available for plotting a sequel. Certainly Mr. Kelleam's novel leaves such an opening. I've got to know whether or not Maya lives, and what of the villain? This novel bears a similarity to the John Carter series that Burroughs wrote. Although these two authors produced similar situations their styles are distinctively different. Kelleam's novel reads as new sf creations should. In other words, I like his story! When do we get more?

James T. Thomas
R.D. #2
Saegerstown, Pa.

Dear Editor:

Referring to the February issue: the novel "Hunters Out of Time" was one of the best I've seen. I hope Kelleam plans on writing a sequel to it because I very much want to know if Doc Odin finds his Maya and Grim Hagan.

PFC Jerry Steele
Box 402
Ft. Ord., Calif.

☉ *To all you Kelleam fans (and, by the way, that's the real name of a real writer), there may be good news ahead. We've asked him to try his hand at a sequel. Kelleam says he will if he can. So . . . a bit of patience and we may all be down in the Underworld again soon.*

...OR SO YOU SAY

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Dear Editor:

Over the past few months I've had some pretty harsh things to say about *Amazing*. But now I guess it is only fitting that I take it all back. With the March issue you have really earned my apology for doubting that you knew how to edit the magazine.

Naturally the Doc Smith story is one of the main reasons for this change of opinions, but it isn't the only one. The Asimov story, or rather stories, is well up to what fans expect of him, and there isn't a really weak story in the whole bunch. "Question of Comfort" is somewhat of a surprise to me. Is Les Collins a new writer? Whether a newcomer or just a pen name let's have some more like it.

The new cover artist Albert Neutzell, is one that I hope you plan to have much more of. A remarkably fine three dimensional effect and beautifully painted.

It kind of looks as though you dug deeply into the backlog of stories to come up with a very special issue. If this was what you were trying to do to make a big splurge in your first few months as editor you certainly succeeded. Actually this one issue was worth the entire price I paid for my subscription.

Probably some of your readers don't care for serials. But I'll be willing to wager there won't be many complaints on that score with this new Smith epic. He seems to get better all the time.

Clayton Hamlin
28 Earle Ave.
Bangor, Maine

• *Thank you, sir, for all those nice words. Frankly, we did try to put together a knockout of an issue to convince you that Amazing was still loaded for bear. But it wasn't just a oneshot effort. Take a look at the June line-up in "Coming Next Month" and you'll see. Incidentally, Collins has been writing good stories for some time. We have more for you!*

Dear Editor:

I have enjoyed all the issues of *Amazing* that I have read, but I find the March '59 issue superlative. I consider it my favorite because of many things.

Asimov, as usual, withheld none of the genius that made him famous. I enjoyed the second story, "Anniversary," more than the twenty-year-old story, "Marooned Off Vesta."

Another thing that made this my favorite story is the novel that you are introducing in parts. This makes for longer novels and less complaints from those who are complaining about the short length

of most of your novels. I don't mind waiting for the other parts of "The Galaxy Primes."

The rest of the stories were good and I was happy to note the absence of Dr. Barron's usual article.

Please congratulate Albert Neutzell, for me, on the excellent cover. I think that it is the best that I have seen on *Amazing* and quite a long time. Try to keep the rest of your covers plain and simple like this one.

Albert Milano
199 Norwood Ave.
Brooklyn 8, N. Y.

○ *Neutzell will be back with another cover in a couple of months.*

Dear Editor:

There couldn't have been a better surprise for the March issue of *Amazing*. Isaac Asimov and Smith together! You can't keep them that way all of the time but try hard every now and then. Another exciting tale like "The Galaxy Primes" and I will begin to think of nothing but the good 'ole days again.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Ala.

Dear Editor:

For several years now I have been another of your many fascinated readers. I firmly believe that no matter how famous the author of a particular story may be, if his works appear in an unattractive book or magazine, one is less likely to buy that book than an attractive book with the same stories in it. Thus I congratulate you for your masterpiece for March. Not only are the stories excellent, but the cover is one of the most attractive that I have seen for a long, long time.

Michael Luke
P.O. Box 55
McMasterville, Quebec, Canada

○ *To all you folks who were so complimentary about our March issue, thanks. If that issue proved to you that we are still trying to give you the best in science-fiction, it proved something to us, too—that there are still plenty of s-f fans around who will buy magazines if you give them good ones!*

⊙

...OR SO YOU SAY

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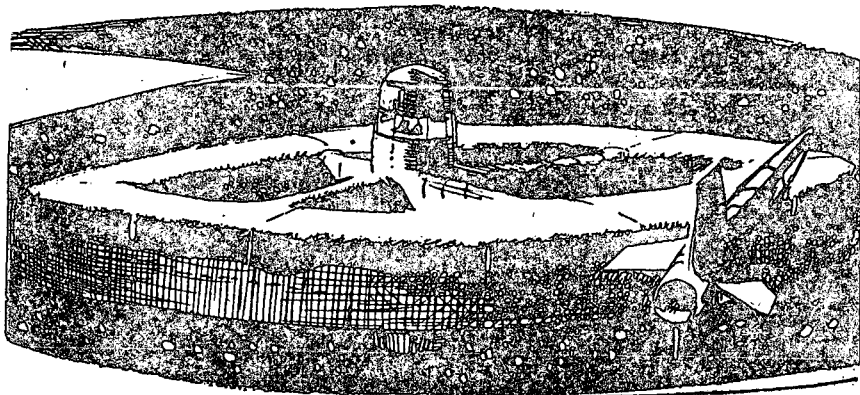
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